

# Remarks at Capitol Hill Ocean Week 2012

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## **Commerce Secretary John Bryson Remarks at Capitol Hill Ocean Week 2012**

Good morning, everyone. On behalf of President Obama and the entire administration: Welcome to Oceans Week. It's great to see such a diverse community here today—from researchers, to businesses, to Congressional staff, to local, regional and nonprofit groups.

I want to thank the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation for putting together a great week, as well as for their input into the National Ocean Policy which will soon enter its implementation phase. Everyone should stay tuned for more on that in the months ahead.

Obviously, this is a crucial moment for America's economy. As we emerge from the biggest recession since the Great Depression, our businesses have added over 4.3 million jobs over the past 27 months.

That's good news, but we still have much more work to do. And today, I'd like to speak about how our oceans play a key role in our economic recovery. The fact is, America's waters have always been a strong economic engine. Some call it the "blue economy."

Sir Walter Raleigh—one of America's early explorers—said this: "For whosoever commands the sea, commands the trade. . . . Whosoever commands the trade of the world, commands the riches of the world and, consequently, the world itself."

I'm sure that Raleigh couldn't have fathomed the impact of planes or railroads, much less e-commerce. But the fact remains: Even centuries after he spoke those memorable words, there remains a vital and powerful link between America's oceans, rivers, lakes and coasts—and America's economy.

Consider this: More than half of Americans live in coastal watershed counties, even though this area makes up only 17 percent of U.S. land area. And those counties support about 66 million jobs.

So now more than ever, we need to ensure that the blue economy is strong and growing. This morning, I'll touch on three ways that we can do that.

First, we need to show off America's waters.

I grew up in Portland, Oregon. As a boy, I remember going with my father and my uncle to the Columbia River. While they would go into the deep water to catch salmon, I would spend much of the day trying to fix the line on my little fishing pole.

Then, while in high school, I worked as a camp counselor on the shores of Puget Sound. I took the campers on three- and four-day canoe trips.

I'm sure that many of you have personal connections like that to our waters. And you cherish those memories that you made with friends and family.

Today, it's time that we share those experiences with the rest of the world. That's what NOAA and the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation are working towards every day. Together, they support 14 marine-protected areas across the United States.

These sanctuaries offer snorkeling, whale watching, fishing and much more. Altogether, NOAA estimates that these communities and coastal businesses drive about \$4 billion into the economy.

And nationwide, we see major impacts on our economy from things like recreational fishing. When you add up the bait shops, boat sales, and the other economic drivers in fishing communities – it comes to more than \$73 billion, supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs.

But here's the problem: Our oceans, coasts and Great Lakes are sometimes overlooked when both Americans and international travelers plan their vacations.

That's part of the reason why Secretary Salazar and I are heading up the administration's new National Travel and Tourism Strategy, which was just released last month.

We believe that showing off our oceans, rivers, lakes and coasts isn't just a nice thing to do. The fact is, travel and tourism is America's number one services export.

Last year, we had an all-time record of 62 million international travelers to the U.S. They supported 7.6 million good American jobs.

We need to build on that momentum. That's why our new plan sets a goal of 100 million visitors each year by 2021.

The only way we are going to meet that goal is if everyone works together. Many federal agencies are involved in this effort. For example, the State Department is working to issue more tourist visas from countries that have a growing middle class.

In addition, our private-sector partners on the U.S. Travel and Tourism Advisory Board are working to ensure a great experience for tourists. For example, they want to make it easier for them to get through our airports and arrive at their final destination.

Today, we need your help. Let's get the word out about the wonderful opportunities to discover and explore America's vast waters.

I encourage you to check out the new Travel and Tourism Strategy, and thank you in advance for helping reach its important goals.

The second way we can strengthen the blue economy is to maximize the potential of our oceans and waterways.

I believe that we can ensure that our oceans are healthy, while also leveraging their ability to drive our economy.

Specifically, they can help increase U.S. exports. Even with air cargo and high-speed trains, it's important to remember that shipping remains a cornerstone of our export infrastructure.

In fact, nearly 99 percent of our foreign goods trade—as measured by volume—is transported by ship.

In 2011, over half a trillion dollars in U.S. goods were exported around the world through shipping. I think Sir Walter Raleigh would be smiling at that.

So it's no surprise that our waterways are a key part of President Obama's National Export Initiative. It seeks to double U.S. exports by 2015. We are making historic progress toward meeting this ambitious goal. Last year we hit an all-time record of \$2.1 trillion in exports.

And our folks at places like NOAA are working harder than ever to build on that. For example, NOAA's Navigational Services Division uses high-tech positioning tools—combined with the latest weather data – to ensure that our exports can move safely and efficiently.

The technology and information we provide to the private sector is particularly important at our nation's ports.

For example, if a shipper knows that a port has just one additional inch of water depth, they can load more goods onto the boat. With that one inch, you can put 99 more Chevy Volts onto a car carrier—or enough wheat to make over 400,000 loaves of bread.

And my commitment is that we will continue to do everything possible to empower our exporters who use the sea to send out good, quality, Made-in-America products.

But today, we must do even more—and I'll just give one important and timely example.

The Senate is now taking a hard look at having the U.S. join the Law of the Sea Convention.

This has the strong support of groups ranging from our military to the World Wildlife Fund to the American Petroleum Institute to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The economic benefits of this treaty are clear.

First, it will ensure that we can continue to protect and maintain our shipping routes. But it's more than that.

It will give our energy companies the certainty they need to make crucial investments that create jobs. It will help our telecommunications companies as they build and maintain undersea cables, and it will secure our access to rare earth minerals which we need to make computers and cell phones.

Importantly, it will also help us urge other countries to support sustainability to protect their marine habitats and species and to promote healthy oceans.

Already, over 160 countries have signed onto this treaty. Republicans and Democrats alike have voiced their support for many years—everyone from Presidents Clinton and Bush, to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, to James Watkins, the former Chief of U.S. Naval Operations, Secretary of Energy, and Chair of the Commission on Oceans Policy.

So, it's clear that no country has more to gain from this treaty than the United States.

Important meetings are already underway to draw up the rules that are flowing from the Convention. The U.S. has an empty seat waiting for us at the table. We need to fill it.

After all, America has never been content to sit back and let others make decisions that could affect our security, our economy, or our environment. The benefits of this Treaty are too great to ignore—especially at this crucial moment in our recovery. We should act now.

Finally, it's commencement season. So I think it's appropriate to close by saying that we need to inspire the next generation to understand, explore and protect our waters in the decades that lie ahead.

About a mile from here, in D.C.'s Crime Museum, NOAA just opened a new exhibit on the 40th anniversary of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

As you know, this law helps protect marine life and our marine ecosystems.

As we speak, there might be a young person wandering around at that museum, looking at the pictures, and thinking—for the first time—"This is what I want to do. This is my world."

I bet that many of you here today had that same "aha!" moment at some point early on.

And today, you probably still have moments that spark your interest and imagination.

For example, I'm sure that many of you know that NOAA's telepresence technology allows us to send seafloor images to researchers and scientists around the world.

As you may have seen on the news a few weeks ago, this helped us uncover an incredible shipwreck deep in the Gulf of Mexico.

Looking forward, we're going to do even more to spark the interest of young people. For example, starting this weekend, we're teaming up with the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and the Sportfishing Conservancy, to launch what's called the Sanctuary Classic. Through competitions and scholarships, the Sanctuary Classic will foster excitement among our youth about conservation and fishing.

So what's clear is this: We need to find young people who share our curiosity and interest in America's waters.

Maybe they want to be an oceanographer or researcher who works in this field. Maybe they want to go into public service at a place like NOAA. Or perhaps they simply want to start a business that helps people understand and enjoy our waterways—like the business I worked for that summer, taking campers on canoe trips on Puget Sound.

We need to identify these young people. We need to nurture them and mentor them. And ultimately, we need to make sure they can make a difference, just like all of you are making today in your daily work.

I will leave you with a quotation from one of my favorite presidents. I have a portrait of him behind my desk at the Commerce Department.

President Kennedy once said, "Knowledge of the oceans is more than a matter of curiosity. Our very survival may hinge upon it." I think that everyone here would agree.

Our oceans and waterways are critical to our prosperity, to our quality of life, and to the future of our nation. So, let's show them off. Let's maximize their potential. And let's inspire the next generation to follow in our footsteps.

Thank you, and have a great week.