

✘ It often seems that Commerce Secretaries come in knowing little or nothing about their Department's responsibilities for ocean resource management and ocean and atmospheric research. One reason [many environmentalists were excited](#) about the prospect of New Mexico Governor [Bill Richardson](#) taking on the job was that Richardson had expressed a strong commitment to ocean protection. But Richardson bowed out because of [an ongoing federal investigation](#) of "pay-to-play" allegations.

Yesterday President Obama [nominated Senator Judd Gregg \(R-N.H.\)](#) to fill the Commerce position. Whatever one might think about the politics of the appointment (or of the accompanying agreement that Gregg's Senate replacement will be a Republican), it appears that Gregg has ocean science and policy chops.

According to [Science Insider \(subscription required\)](#), science advocates, including the chief scientist for environmental advocacy group [Oceana](#) support the nomination because Gregg has been a supporter of ocean research while chairing the Senate Appropriations subcommittee responsible for NOAA. Gregg has also been a moderate on climate change, an important issue for a Cabinet member who will be responsible for one of the nation's premier climate science agencies.

One caveat for environmentalists is that Gregg reportedly has been a supporter of offshore aquaculture. [NOAA was pushing](#) expansion of offshore aquaculture in federal waters during the Bush administration, supporting the National Offshore Aquaculture Act, which failed to reach the floor of either the [House](#) or [Senate](#) in its most recent incarnation, in part because scientists and environmental groups were critical of the lack of enforceable environmental controls. No doubt the question of how to balance aquaculture and environmental protection will surface again in this administration.