

Senator Brown's FOIA Request: Newly Exposed Findings of the Inspector General on NOAA's Party Boat

On Thursday, February 16, 2012, Senator Scott Brown asked the Commerce Department Inspector General to provide him with a copy of a report on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) illicit purchase and use of \$300,000 luxury fishing boat. The Inspector General provided the report, which revealed the following:

- The boat was purchased in violation of federal procurement rules and involved manipulation of the contracting process.
- The boat was purchased and operated with Asset Forfeiture Fund money seized from fishermen.
- The boat's operation "served no reasonable official purpose."
- The boat has only been used for 40 hours and never for official business.
- NOAA's use of the boat consisted entirely of:
 - Trips to dockside restaurants
 - Hamburger and hotdog BBQs with family and friends
 - Alcohol-fueled parties and TV watching by family of NOAA employees
 - "Pleasure cruises" at high rates of speed, with beer consumed on-board.
 - Overnight family trips to a posh resort near Blaine, Washington
 - NOAA employee and family took a marked NOAA boat after blowing out the unmarked boat's engine en route to their weekend getaway.
 - The employee involved later stated that he "forgot" about the family on board.
- An unqualified NOAA operator blew out an expensive engine.
- Another NOAA employee left the boat stranded in middle of Puget Sound within the path of larger vessels, with his parents on board.
- NOAA claimed that these uses were necessary to preserve the boat's "undercover" profile.
- Uncooperative NOAA employees and family misled the Inspector General investigators, "forgot" boat trips until reminded, "were not candid," and changed their stories repeatedly.
- A NOAA employee "inappropriately" received \$12,000 in reimbursement from the Asset Forfeiture Fund for boat-related expenses on his personal credit card, racking up credit card points in the process.