**POLITICO**PRO

## Are lawmakers eating seafood produced by slaves?

## Rep. Jared Huffman said there's no doubt illegally produced foreign

seafood has made its way to the Capitol. "I mean, that's just a certainty," he said Friday. BY: ROB HOTAKAINEN | 02/06/2024 06:27 AM EST



**E&E**DAILY



"We have been eating slavery-tainted seafood in the Capitol — I mean, that's just a certainty," the California Democrat said in an interview Friday.

administration has not done enough to crack down on Sysco, a major Texasbased supplier that provides food throughout the Capitol and in executive office buildings. Reports have linked the company's products to forced labor in China.

Huffman is among a group of 22 bipartisan House members who say the Biden

on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries, also put the blame on NOAA, saying the agency has failed with its inspections of imported seafood. "Honestly, I think we've just got to have a very candid conversation about the fact that NOAA and the Department of Commerce have proven completely incapable of doing this," he said.

Huffman, the ranking member of the House Natural Resources Subcommittee

Neither the White House nor NOAA responded to a request for comment. The lawmakers — 20 Democrats and two Republicans — first expressed their concerns last month in a letter to President Joe Biden, saying it was "quite possible that we have unknowingly been served seafood products tainted by

"And my view is we need to look at where in the federal government a more

dedicated and competent approach to it might reside."

necessary."

Huffman took it a step further Friday, saying: "There's no maybe about it."

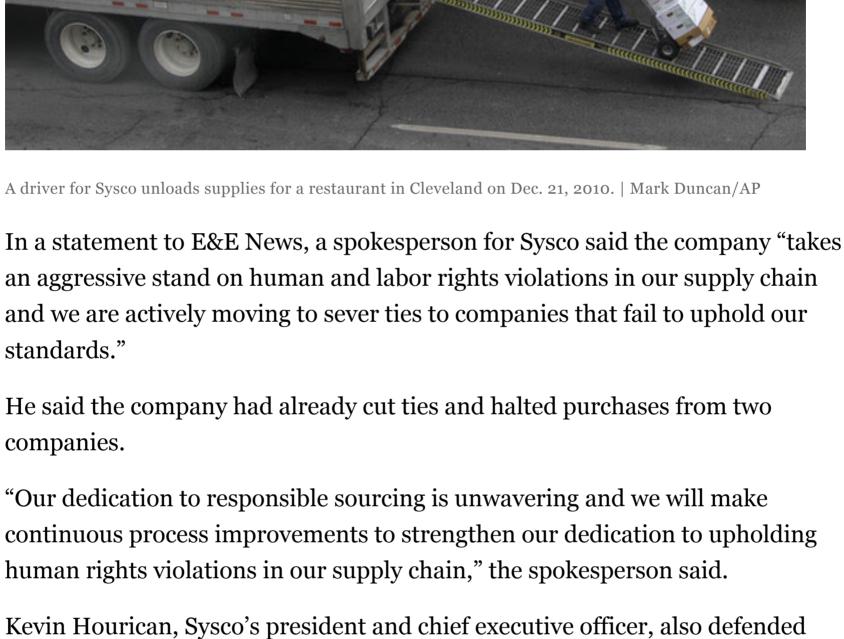
"I would certainly welcome that, but we're not letting go of this," Huffman said.

"We're gonna keep leaning in until we see the kind of change that we think is

They said that included members of Congress, their staffs and visitors.

He added that the White House has not responded to the Jan. 9 letter.

IUU (illegal, unreported and unregulated) fishing and forced labor."



the company in a January letter to Huffman, saying, "We can all agree that human rights violations, wherever they may occur in the world or as part of any supply chain, are abhorrent and unacceptable.

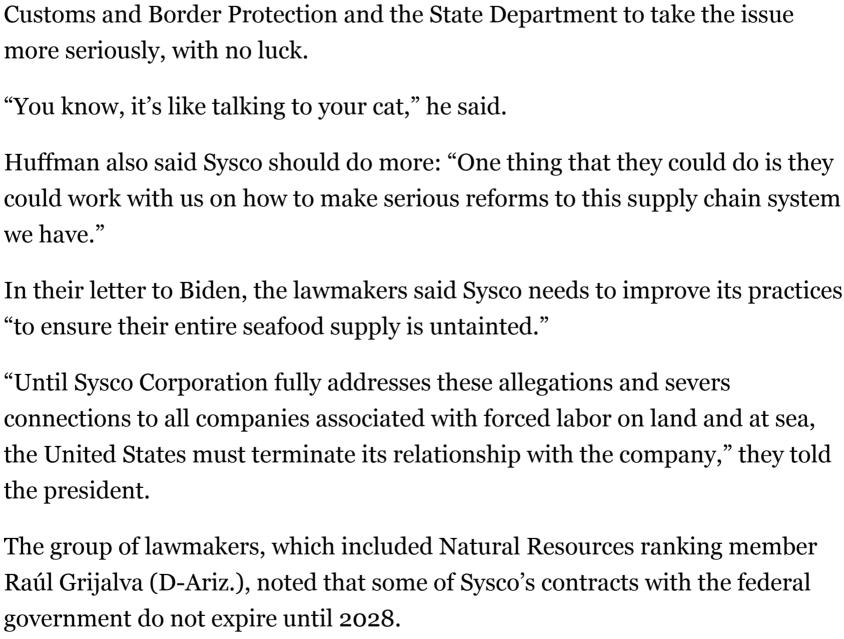
"Knowing that this is a broad-based supply chain concern, Sysco will continue

to do our part by leading our industry in upholding human rights," he told

Rep. Jared Huffman (D-Calif.). | Francis Chung/POLITICO

Huffman.

'Like talking to your cat'



In addition to criticizing NOAA, Huffman said lawmakers had tried to get the

and tribal nations have also likely unknowingly been provided with seafood products directly connected to forced labor and IUU fishing within Sysco Corporation's supply chain," the lawmakers wrote. A spokesperson for the Interior Department said the department had no comment.

November when the agency said it would delay a long-planned expansion of its

seafood inspection program and that it needed more time to study the issue.

According to the letter, the contracts with the company call for providing fish

and other seafood products to a long list of agencies, including the Bureau of

Management, the Department of Agriculture, the Indian Health Service, the

Army Corps of Engineers, the Army, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"This means that our nation's military trainees, veterans, federal employees,

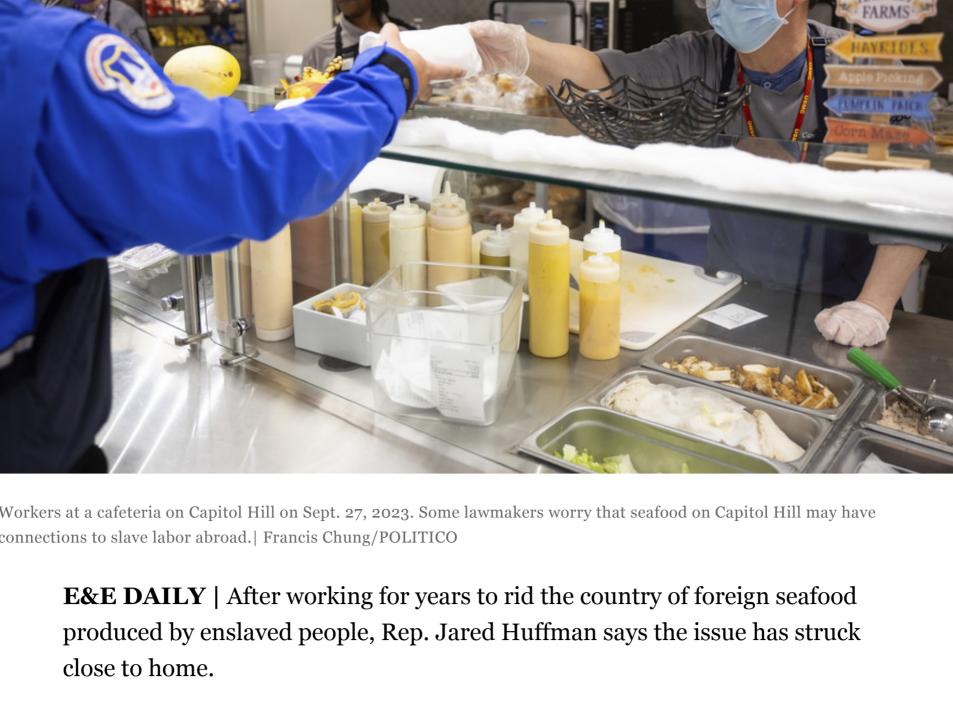
Indian Education, the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land

Huffman repeated his criticism Friday, saying, "As if we haven't taken the last decade to study it." In November, Huffman called the delay "a huge mistake," citing an

Huffman, Grijalva and other critics expressed frustration with NOAA in

investigative report in *The New Yorker*, published in October in collaboration with the Outlaw Ocean Project. It documented the growing use of Uyghur forced labor in the processing of seafood, with more of it finding its way to U.S. grocery stores and restaurants.

All told, the lawmakers said, the U.S. government has now "inadvertently expended" more than \$200 million in the past five years on seafood linked to Uyghur labor.



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