

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Natural Resources

Washington, DC 20515

September 10, 2019

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Ross:

I am writing in response to credible allegations reported by The New York Times that you personally intervened in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's response to a series of communications regarding the projected path of Hurricane Dorian.¹ Specifically, it is reported that you called Dr. Neil Jacobs, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Acting Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere on Friday, September 6, 2019, instructing him to "fix the agency's perceived contradiction of the president" and that you threatened to fire the political staff of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Later that day, NOAA issued an unsigned statement² backpedaling a tweet³ made by the National Weather Service's Birmingham, Alabama office intended to inform Alabamians that the National Weather Service was not anticipating any impacts to Alabama by Hurricane Dorian despite inaccurate communications by President Trump to the contrary.

As Americans face more intense and frequent catastrophic storms, NOAA's role in predicting and communicating scientifically sound weather forecasts is critical and must be free of political influence. If true, these allegations, along with your prior promulgation of regulations to allow overfishing, demonstrate a potential pattern of intent to exert political influence over the agency's scientific integrity. This most recent action erodes trust of the American people in NOAA's products and services, which have for decades been the global standard in environmental observation and prediction. Any threat of reprisal to political or career employees, based on disagreements about the best available science further inhibits the ability of the agency to serve the American people.

To assist the Committee's oversight of these issues, please provide the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than Tuesday, September 24:

¹ Christopher Flavelle, Lisa Friedman and Peter Baker, *Commerce Chief Threatened Firings at NOAA After Trump's Hurricane Tweets, Sources Say*. The New York Times (Sep. 9, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/09/climate/hurricane-dorian-trump-tweet.html?action=click&module=Top%20Stories&pgtype=Homepage>

² Statement from NOAA, (Sep. 6, 2019), available at <https://www.noaa.gov/news/statement-from-noaa>

³ National Weather Service Birmingham (@NWSBirmingham), Tweet "Alabama will NOT see any impacts from #Dorian. We repeat, no impacts from Hurricane #Dorian will be felt across Alabama. The system will remain too far east. #alwx" (Sep. 1, 2019, 8:11AM)

1. All documents, communications, and records of communications referring or relating to the creation or drafting of NOAA's unsigned September 6 statement;
2. All documents, communication, and records of communications from Secretary Ross and Department of Commerce staff referring or relating to participation in communication related to Hurricane Dorian; and
3. All documents and communications from NOAA and NWS employees referring or relating to participation in communications related to Hurricane Dorian.

Please contact the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee staff at (202) 225-6065 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Raúl M. Grijalva
Chair
Committee on Natural Resources



Jared Huffman
Chair
Subcommittee on Water, Oceans,
and Wildlife

Responding to Committee Document Requests

In responding to document requests from the Committee on Natural Resources, please apply the instructions and definitions set forth below:

Instructions

1. In complying with the request, you should produce all responsive documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, and representatives acting on your behalf. You should also produce documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access, as well as documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party. Requested records, documents, data, or information should not be destroyed, modified, removed, transferred, or otherwise made inaccessible to the Committee.
2. In the event that any entity, organization, or individual denoted in this request has been, or is currently, known by any other name than that herein denoted, the request should be read also to include them under that alternative identification.
3. The Committee's preference is to receive documents in electronic form (i.e., memory stick or thumb drive) in lieu of paper productions. Documents produced in electronic format should also be organized, identified, and indexed electronically. Consult with the Committee to determine the appropriate format in which to produce the information.
4. Each document produced should be produced in a form that renders the document capable of being copied.
5. Documents produced to the Committee should include an index describing the contents of the production. To the extent more than one CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box, or folder is produced, each CD, hard drive, memory stick, thumb drive, box, or folder should contain an index describing its contents.
6. Documents produced in response to this request should be produced together with copies of file labels, dividers or identifying markers with which they were associated when this request was issued. To the extent that documents were not stored with file labels, dividers, or identifying markers, they should be organized into separate folders by subject matter prior to production.
7. When you produce documents, you should identify the paragraph in the Committee's schedule to which the documents respond.
8. It shall not be a basis for refusal to produce documents that any other person or entity also possesses a non-identical or identical copy of the same documents.
9. If compliance with the request cannot be made in full, compliance should be made to the extent possible and should include an explanation of why full compliance is not possible.

10. In the event that any document or part of a document is withheld on the basis of privilege, provide a privilege log containing the following information concerning any such document or part of a document: (a) the privilege asserted; (b) the type of document; (c) the general subject matter; (d) the date, author and addressee; and (e) the relationship of the author and addressee to each other.
11. If any document responsive to this request was, but no longer is, in your possession, custody, or control, you should identify the document (stating its date, author, subject and recipients) and explain the circumstances by which the document ceased to be in your possession, custody, or control.
12. If a date or other descriptive detail set forth in this request referring to a document is inaccurate, but the actual date or other descriptive detail is known to you or is otherwise apparent from the context of the request, you should produce all documents which would be responsive as if the date or other descriptive detail were correct.
13. This request is continuing in nature and applies to any newly-discovered information. Any record, document, compilation of data, or information not produced because it has not been located or discovered by the return date should be produced immediately upon location or discovery subsequent thereto.
14. All documents should be Bates-stamped sequentially and produced sequentially.
15. Documents produced to the Committee in response to this request should be delivered to majority staff in Room 1324 of the Longworth House Office Building.

Definitions

1. The term "**document**" means any written, recorded, or graphic matter of any nature whatsoever, regardless of how recorded, and whether original or copy, including, but not limited to, the following: memoranda, reports, expense reports, books, manuals, instructions, financial reports, working papers, records notes, letters, notices, confirmations, telegrams, receipts, appraisals, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, prospectuses, interoffice and intra-office communications, electronic mail (e-mail), contracts, cables, notations of any type of conversation, telephone calls, text messages, MMS or SMS messages, other mobile-to-mobile messages, instant messages or online chat messages, meetings or other communications, bulletins, printed matter, computer printouts, teletypes, invoices, transcripts, diaries, analyses, returns, summaries, minutes, bills, accounts, estimates, projections, comparisons, messages, correspondence, press releases, circulars, financial statements, reviews, opinions, offers, studies and investigations, questionnaires and surveys, and work sheets (and all drafts, preliminary versions, alterations, modifications, revisions, changes, and amendments of any of the foregoing, as well as any attachments or appendices thereto), and graphic or oral records or representations of any kind (including without limitation, photographs, charts, graphs, voice mails, microfiche, microfilm, videotape,

recordings and motion pictures), and electronic and mechanical records or representations of any kind (including, without limitation, tapes, cassettes, disks, computer server files, computer hard drive files, CDs, DVDs, memory sticks, and recordings) and other written, printed, typed, or other graphic or recorded matter of any kind or nature, however produced or reproduced, and whether preserved in writing, film, tape, disk, videotape or otherwise. A document bearing any notation not a part of the original text is to be considered a separate document. A draft or non-identical copy is a separate document within the meaning of this term.

2. The term "**documents in your possession, custody, or control**" means (a) documents that are in your possession, custody, or control, whether held by you or your past or present agents, employees, or representatives acting on your behalf; (b) documents that you have a legal right to obtain, that you have a right to copy, or to which you have access; and (c) documents that you have placed in the temporary possession, custody, or control of any third party.
3. The term "**communication**" means each manner or means of disclosure or exchange of information, regardless of means utilized, whether oral, electronic, by document or otherwise, and whether face-to-face, in a meeting, by telephone, facsimile, mail, e-mail (desktop or mobile device), text message, MMS or SMS message, other mobile-to-mobile message, instant message or online chat, telexes, releases, personal delivery, or otherwise.
4. The terms "**and**" and "**or**" shall be construed broadly and either conjunctively or disjunctively to bring within the scope of this request any information which might otherwise be construed to be outside its scope. The singular includes plural number, and vice versa. The masculine includes the feminine and neuter genders.
5. The terms "**person**" or "**persons**" means natural persons, firms, partnerships, associations, corporations, subsidiaries, divisions, departments, joint ventures, proprietorships, syndicates, or other legal, business or government entities, and all subsidiaries, affiliates, divisions, departments, branches, and other units thereof.
6. The term "**identify**," when used in a question about individuals, means to provide the following information: (a) the individual's complete name and title; and (b) the individual's business address and phone number.
7. The terms "**referring or relating**," with respect to any given subject, means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, reflects, identifies, states, refers to, deals with or is in any manner whatsoever pertinent to that subject.
8. The term "**employee**" means agent, borrowed employee, casual employee, consultant, contractor, de facto employee, independent contractor, joint adventurer, loaned employee, part-time employee, permanent employee, provisional employee, subcontractor, or any other type of service provider.