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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <https://commerce.senate.gov>

February 19, 2025

The Honorable Howard Lutnick  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick,

I urge the Administration to protect the critical workforce of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (“NOAA”). NOAA’s National Weather Service (“NWS”) should be exempt from the January 20<sup>th</sup> executive order titled “Hiring Freeze”, which instituted a hiring freeze for all federal civilian employees, due to the critical role the agency plays in public safety and supporting our economy. In light of highly publicized firings at other agencies, all NOAA employees, including probationary or temporary employees, should be protected from firing or reduction in force initiatives that would jeopardize the safety of the American public.

NOAA is the nation’s leading scientific agency charged with forecasting weather, monitoring our oceans and atmosphere, managing our fisheries, restoring our coasts, and supporting maritime commerce. NOAA products and services, such as forecasts, are crucial to the U.S. economy and affect more than one-third of America’s gross domestic product.

Within NOAA, the NWS is responsible for protecting public safety and property and supporting the economy by providing timely and accurate weather forecasts and warnings. Our communities are extremely reliant on the data and research that NOAA and NWS scientists make available for decision-makers, emergency responders, and the public. According to the National Centers for Environmental Information, last year there were 27 weather disaster events that cost over \$1 billion each and resulted in 568 deaths. NWS meteorologists, using a network of satellites, buoys, balloon launches, ships, aircraft, and weather stations, collect data and develop forecasts and warnings on which communities rely for preparedness for hurricanes, heat waves, wildfires, tornadoes, blizzards, drought, and other extreme weather events.

The NWS also supports real-time forecasts and services needed to protect the safety of the traveling public. The NWS Center Weather Service Units embed meteorologists at 21 Air Route Traffic Control Centers to provide tailored forecasts that ensure it is safe for aircraft to fly. The meteorologists identify, forecast, and communicate weather hazards, such as thunderstorms, turbulence, and icing, to help pilots and air traffic controllers make informed decisions that minimize risks to flights and delays.

When a hurricane approaches our coasts, the National Hurricane Center sends Hurricane Hunters into the eye of the storm to give forecasters a better idea of the storm's intensity and when it's likely to make landfall. The Storm Prediction Center warns communities when a tornado or severe storm is developing to give them time to protect property and get to safety. The NWS also creates forecasts for emergency responders to plan for wildfire season, issues warnings to help communities prepare when fire conditions are severe, deploys specially trained forecasters to provide real-time lifesaving forecasts on the frontlines to keep firefighters safe, and models how smoke will move and impact air quality across the country.

And far beyond our atmosphere, the NWS monitors space weather, such as solar flares and geomagnetic storms, to protect satellite systems, communication networks, and power grids. The Space Weather Prediction Center forecasts and helps mitigate the worst impacts of space weather including the potential for widespread and long-lasting blackouts, significant disruption of satellite and radio communication networks that are essential for safe air travel and military operations, and unreliable GPS signals that hamper navigation for ships, planes, and farm equipment.

In addition to the NWS, NOAA provides a host of other life-saving data and services. The NOAA Office of Coast Survey ensures safe shipping routes in our waters by charting 95,000 miles of shoreline and 3.4 million square nautical miles of waters, providing more than \$2.4 billion in annual benefits to the U.S. economy. NOAA manages the nation's fisheries, which support 1.7 million jobs across the United States. The two Tsunami Warning Centers monitor seismic activity and ocean conditions to detect potential tsunamis, issuing timely warnings and advisories to protect coastal communities from disaster. And finally, NOAA plays a vital role in monitoring, forecasting, and researching harmful algal blooms ("HABs") that produce toxins that can be deadly. NOAA scientists track HAB events using satellite imagery, water samples, and oceanographic data to provide early warnings to coastal communities, fisheries, and public health officials, helping to ensure commercially harvested fish and shellfish are safe to eat.

Without NOAA's workforce, communities will not be prepared for the next big Nor'easter, hurricane, wildfire, or drought. Ships will not be able to safely navigate through our waterways. Farmers will not have the data they need to manage their crops. NOAA's workforce keeps people alive and provides communities with the scientific support tools to protect their families and grow their businesses. I urge you to appreciate these critical government functions and reverse the hiring freeze and refrain from mass firings of these invaluable public servants—American lives depend on it.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member