

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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February 18th, 2025

Howard Lutnick
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick,

We write to you with the urgent request that Department of Commerce (DOC) employees performing work necessary for public safety and national security be protected from the irrational and mindless mass firings pushed by the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). It is imperative that you stand up for the critical work being done throughout the DOC and refuse to cede your leadership to Elon Musk.

In the run-up to last week's widespread firings across the executive branch, the White House issued an executive order stating unambiguously that statutory offices would be deprioritized in the reductions in force and that employees with national security, homeland security, or public safety responsibilities would be exempted.¹ This was a lie. The clearest example of this mendacity was the termination of hundreds of employees from the Department of Energy's (DOE) National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). Congress created NNSA in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000 for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing the safety and performance of our country's nuclear weapons and promoting international nuclear nonproliferation.² Any reasonable person – even the 23-year-old sent to DOE to do Elon Musk's bidding³ – should have had no trouble grasping the national security importance of this office. However, not only did DOGE's Luke Farritor fail to draw this obvious conclusion on his own – according to reporting, the Trump administration explicitly denied the exemptions requested by NNSA managers. On February 13, over the pleading of NNSA leaders,

¹ "Implementing the President's 'Department of Government Efficiency' Workforce Optimization Initiative," Executive Order, The White House, February 11, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/implementing-the-presidents-department-of-government-efficiency-workforce-optimization-initiative/>

² National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, Title XXXII, Sec. 3201, accessed here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-106publ65/html/PLAW-106publ65.htm>

³ Ella Nilse, Sean Lyngaas, "Trump energy secretary allowed 23-year-old DOGE rep to access IT systems over objections from general counsel," February 7, 2025, *CNN*, accessed here: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/06/climate/doge-energy-department-trump/index.html>

hundreds of people were fired.⁴ On February 14, the Administration apparently realized its mistake and attempted to backtrack in a panic, but, according to reported emails, officials could not get in touch with the employees they had terminated.⁵ This situation is a threat to public safety at home and a deep embarrassment on the international stage, displaying to our adversaries that President Trump and President Musk's sloppiness and poor decision making extends to matters as grave as nuclear weapons.

We have absolutely no confidence that the Trump-Musk White House will handle DOC with the appropriate attention and sensitivity to its myriad public safety responsibilities. It falls to you to be an unflinching advocate for DOC and for the hundreds of millions of Americans who rely on its activities every day. While we expect you to conduct a comprehensive assessment of all the crucial functions throughout the Department's 13 bureaus, we will emphasize a matter that falls within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology – the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) operational services. Through offices such as the National Weather Service and the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service, NOAA scientists forecast and communicate weather data.^{6,7} This winter has seen fires rip through Southern California, and blizzards and extreme cold have slammed regions of our country that haven't seen snow in years. If NOAA scientists are indiscriminately fired to appease Elon Musk, Americans will be unprepared for the next extreme weather event, and lives may be lost that could have been saved. In your first action as the confirmed Secretary of the Department of Commerce, we urge you to protect your workforce providing critical services – and, by extension, to protect every American who depends on them. In the words of former Environment Subcommittee Chairman Max Miller, “weather information directly saves lives and protects entire communities ... from economic devastation.”⁸

Pursuant to Rule X of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology “shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development.”⁹ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over “environmental research and development, marine research ... outer space, including exploration and control thereof,” the National Weather Service, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology.¹⁰ If you have any questions regarding this letter, please

⁴ Geogg Brumfiel, “Trump firings cause chaos at agency responsible for America’s nuclear weapons,” February 14, 2025, *NPR*, accessed here: <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/14/nx-s1-5298190/nuclear-agency-trump-firings-nnsa>

⁵ Peter Alexander, Alexandra Marquez, “Trump administration wants to un-fire nuclear safety workers but can't figure out how to reach them” February 15, 2025, *NBC News*, accessed here: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-administration-wants-un-fire-nuclear-safety-workers-cant-figure-rcna192345>

⁶ National Weather Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, accessed here: <https://www.weather.gov/>

⁷ National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, accessed here: <https://www.nesdis.noaa.gov/>

⁸ “Subcommittee Chairman Max Miller Opening Statement at Environment Subcommittee Hearing on Reauthorizing the Weather Act: Data and Innovation for Predictions,” House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, March 28, 2023, accessed here: <https://science.house.gov/opening-statements?ID=A9F75F47-789B-4CE2-9CD2-6AB4D147CFEB>

⁹ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

¹⁰ *Id.*

contact Kristi Parrott or Sara Palasits with the Committee's Minority staff at (202) 225-6375.
Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology



Gabe Amo
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment



Haley Stevens
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Research & Technology

CC: Brian Babin
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Chairman Scott Franklin
Subcommittee on Environment

Chairman Jay Obernolte
Subcommittee on Research & Technology