

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6375

www.science.house.gov

December 10, 2019

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Ross,

I write to follow up to letters I sent to you on October 10, 2019 and September 11, 2019 regarding the Department of Commerce's actions in response to President Donald Trump's assertions that Alabama would be "hit (much) harder than anticipated" by Hurricane Dorian.¹ My first letter requested answers to seven questions and documents. Having received no materials or response from the Department by October 10, my second letter asked the Department to prioritize seven specific items in a response to be delivered to the Committee no later than October 18, 2019.

To date, we have received no responsive materials from the Department that would address the items in either of these letters, despite repeated follow-up phone calls and emails to the Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs. On November 6, the Committee on House Science, Space & Technology did receive 217 pages of documents accompanied by a transmittal on Department of Commerce letterhead, but the contents seem to be a response to a separate letter we sent to the Acting Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) on September 10. Those materials include select communications between only NOAA officials and none from the Department of Commerce itself. I do not consider the November 6 submission to resolve my October 10 and September 11 letters. The Department has also made no effort to arrange the briefings I specified in these letters.

The Department of Commerce's communications with the public on weather forecasting is a critical government function that depends on the public trust in order to ensure the health and safety of all Americans. The Department's refusals to give a public explanation for its actions in early September and to cooperate with Congressional oversight after the fact are harmful to our

¹ President Donald Trump, "In addition to Florida - South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, will most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated. Looking like one of the largest hurricanes ever. Already category 5. BE CAREFUL! GOD BLESS EVERYONE!" Twitter, September 1, 2019, accessed here: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1168174613827899393>

national weather enterprise. If the Department continues to thwart this Committee's efforts, then we will be forced to resort to compulsory processes. I ask again for the priority items I requested in my October 10, 2019 letter:

1. Please make Julie Kay Roberts, Michael Walsh Jr., Earl Comstock, and Dave Dewhirst available for a briefing on their role in the public communications around Hurricane Dorian. A date for the briefing must be agreed upon by December 14, 2019.
2. Please provide records of all phone calls and teleconferences between Commerce and NOAA officials on September 6, including participant logs, notes, calendar events, or other documentation.
3. Please provide copies of all drafts of the statement in existence from the predawn hours on September 6 – when Dr. Jacobs was first contacted by Mr. Walsh – until the statement's publication that evening.
4. Please provide all documents (including comments, notes, emails, legal or other memoranda, telephone logs, letters, text messages, meeting minutes and calendars, slides and presentations) that relate to the formulation and issuance of the September 6 public statement from NOAA, including tweets.
5. Please provide records of all phone calls, teleconferences, and meetings between Commerce and Executive Office of the President officials regarding the drafting and issuance of the September 6 statement, including participant logs, notes, calendar events, emails and attachments, letters, and any other documentation.
6. Please provide all material related to this matter that has been turned over to the Department of Commerce Office of the Inspector General (OIG).

If you would like to discuss further, please contact Ms. Janie Thompson at 202-225-6375.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
Committee on Science, Space & Technology

CC:

Frank Lucas
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space and Technology