

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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May 1st, 2025

The Honorable Laura Grimm
Acting Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Administrator Grimm,

NOAA is in danger. The agency is a national treasure, overseeing a host of essential programs that maintain public safety, support economic growth, and advance scientific knowledge. From Weather Forecast Offices on the ground to satellites above the Earth; from the lakes and oceans that surround America to the fisheries that drive coastal economies; and from the dedicated scientists in laboratories across the country to the extramural grants and collaborations that produce groundbreaking research, Americans need NOAA to keep our country safe and help us prepare economically and scientifically for the future. But instead of protecting and supporting NOAA, the Trump Administration appears determined to dismantle it. And instead of a leadership that stands up for NOAA and fights for it, the agency's leadership appears to be taking orders from those seeking to destroy it. We have obtained new information that points to pernicious external control over NOAA. We intend to investigate the nature of this external control, identify the source of it, and ensure that it can no longer threaten NOAA's ability to promote safety, prosperity, and scientific advancement.

NOAA is under siege. As the Ranking Member of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology ("the Committee") and the Ranking Members of the Subcommittee on Environment and the Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight, we continue to defend NOAA in the face of the Trump Administration's unrelenting assault on the agency. NOAA employees have been bullied and intimidated with a series of hostile personnel actions designed to bludgeon them into taking "deferred resignation" or early retirement offers.¹ NOAA facility leases – including the leases for critical weather forecasting centers – have been threatened with cancelation, a plan partially exposed by this Committee.² NOAA contract renewals have been held up without

¹ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/03/20/noaa-offers-buyouts-early-retirement/82573145007/>.

² <https://democrats-science.house.gov/news/press-releases/committee-leaders-huffman-lofgren-dexter-and-amo-demand-information-on-noaa-lease-terminations>.

explanation, halting some vital services³ and forcing panicked last-minute scrambles to save others.⁴ Finally, around 880 NOAA probationary employees were summarily fired in a purge of dubious legality that sparked chaos inside the agency and embroiled NOAA in ongoing litigation that has yet to be resolved.⁵ The probationary firings were cruel, arbitrary, indiscriminate, and inflicted damage on core agency functions that has yet to be repaired and only worsens with each passing day.

In such a turbulent moment, NOAA needs strong leadership more than ever. The agency must have leaders who are empowered to advocate on its behalf, fight for its interests, and stand up for the people who rely on it. But we fear NOAA lacks that leadership today. We have obtained information that calls into question who is really leading the agency and who possesses the authority to make crucial decisions with vast implications for the nation and the American people.

The probationary firings at NOAA led some employees to file Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) complaints. According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, federal employees or job applicants have a legal right to file an EEO complaint if they believe a federal agency has discriminated against them on the basis of “race, color, religion, sex (including transgender status, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information.”⁶ The filing of a formal EEO complaint initiates a formal process that includes an agency investigation into the complaint, a hearing before an EEOC Administrative Judge or an agency decision, and a process of appeal.⁷ At NOAA, formal agency policy directs agency employees to begin the EEO complaint process by registering a pre-complaint with the NOAA Office of Civil Rights (OCR).⁸ EEO pre-complaints at NOAA trigger certain processes and obligations that are required as part of the EEO complaint process.

According to a document obtained by the Committee, Vice Admiral Nancy Hann submitted responses to a series of questions posed to her by the NOAA OCR as a part of a pre-complaint EEO process related to the firing of a probationary employee. Vice Admiral Hann has served as the NOAA Deputy Under Secretary for Operations since August 2024, but she also served as the NOAA Acting Administrator at the time of the agency-wide probationary firings.⁹ As a result, she was the highest-ranking official at NOAA when the order to fire the agency’s probationary employees was executed. Yet despite supposedly being in charge at NOAA, Vice Admiral Hann apparently was taking orders from someone else. In a response to one question from OCR, Vice Admiral Hann admitted that she was “directed” to fire probationary employees from “a list provided to me” by unnamed individuals:

³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/04/09/national-weather-service-alerts-translated/83017659007/>.

⁴ <https://www.axios.com/2025/04/04/noaa-research-websites-go-dark-saturday-night;>
<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/policy/energy-and-environment/3387325/trump-backtracks-noaa-funding-restored-contracts-climate-data/>.

⁵ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/02/27/mass-job-cuts-hit-noaa-parent-agency-of-nws/80173611007/>.

⁶ <https://www.eeoc.gov/federal-sector/overview-federal-sector-eeo-complaint-process>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ <https://www.noaa.gov/civil-rights/eeo-counseling-complaints>.

⁹ <https://www.axios.com/2025/04/01/acting-noaa-administrator-changes>.

“OCR: What prompted your decision to terminate certain Probationary employees?”

Hann: I was directed to issue terminations for individuals on a list provided to me.”

Vice Admiral Hann did not subsequently clarify who had prepared the list of probationary employees for termination. She did, however, offer further insight into the officials who were involved in the broader decision-making process surrounding the probationary firings. Later in her responses, Vice Admiral Hann was asked whether any other individuals were “involved in the decision to Terminate during Probation.” Without providing additional details about the nature of their participation, she identified a group of seven officials at NOAA and the Department of Commerce (DOC) who were involved:

“OCR: Were other individuals involved in the decision to Terminate during Probation? If so, who and what role did they play in the decision?”

Hann: Yes.

- **Octavia Saine, Acting Director, Office of Human Capital Services (OHCS)**
- **Ade’Leaka Gore, Acting Deputy Director, OHCS**
- **Laura Grimm, NOAA Chief of Staff, Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator**
- **Beth Leech, DOC – Office of the General Counsel (OGC)**
- **John Guenther, DOC – OGC**
- **Kardesha Bradley, DOC – OGC**
- **Toni Parham, NOAA, Office of Chief Administrative Officer (OCAO)”**

We note that you yourself, Acting Administrator Grimm, were identified as one of the small group of individuals who was involved in the decision to fire probationary employees.

This is an extremely troubling situation with disturbing implications for NOAA. If the agency’s own leaders are not in charge – if they lack discretion, lack authority, and merely serve as figureheads to implement decisions based on lists provided to them by others – the agency itself is made vulnerable to poorly conceived, ill-informed decisions by outsiders who lack technical expertise related to NOAA’s work and who may know nothing about NOAA’s mission, organization, and workforce. The disastrous¹⁰ consequences¹¹ of the probationary firings demonstrate precisely why this is so harmful to the agency. And if the agency’s leaders are simply following orders from undisclosed outsiders, the agency lacks accountability to Congress and to the American people. How do we know where true authority lies? It may very well be the case that the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) prepared the list of NOAA probationary employees to be fired as a part of its destructive rampage through the federal government and then forced NOAA leadership to submit to its commands. DOGE’s

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/16/climate/national-weather-service-forecast-doge-trump.html#>.

¹¹ <https://fedscoop.com/noaa-firings-spark-concerns-for-agencys-data-centric-mission/>.

ignorance knows no bounds, and we can think of few things more alarming for NOAA's future than to give DOGE the power to dictate its fate.

The stakes could not be higher. As the Trump Administration weighs drastic budget cuts at NOAA¹² and a sweeping Reduction in Force (RIF) plan¹³ for the agency, the country has a right to know who will be making these decisions and whether the leaders who know the agency best – and who have been charged with leading it – will possess the authority to advocate for its best interests.

The distortion in decision-making authority at the upper echelons of NOAA is intolerable. Secret decisions made by unknown parties is not how government should be run in a democracy. We cannot accept this state of affairs. We are therefore launching an investigation and demanding information that will clarify the situation and shed light on who, exactly, is in charge. Please provide the following documentation no later than 5:00 PM on May 22nd, 2025:

1. A copy of the list of NOAA probationary employees that was provided to Vice Admiral Nancy Hann for the purpose of directing the terminations of those individuals, as stated by Vice Admiral Hann in her EEO pre-complaint responses;
2. All documents and communications (including, but not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, comments, notes, analyses, legal and other memoranda, letters, telephone logs, Signal messages, meeting minutes, calendar entries, PowerPoint slides, and presentation materials) exchanged between Vice Admiral Nancy Hann and any employee of NOAA, the Department of Commerce, or the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) regarding the preparation, finalization, or decision to act based upon, the aforementioned list of NOAA probationary employees referenced in item 1;
3. All documents and communications (including, but not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, comments, notes, analyses, legal and other memoranda, letters, telephone logs, Signal messages, meeting minutes, calendar entries, PowerPoint slides, and presentation materials) exchanged between any members of the following group of officials regarding the preparation, finalization, or decision to act based upon, the aforementioned list of NOAA probationary employees referenced in item 1:
 - a. Vice Admiral Nancy Hann
 - b. Octavia Saine, Acting Director, Office of Human Capital Services (OHCS)
 - c. Ade'Leaka Gore, Acting Deputy Director, OHCS
 - d. Laura Grimm, NOAA Chief of Staff, Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator
 - e. Beth Leech, DOC – Office of the General Counsel (OGC)
 - f. John Guenther, DOC – OGC
 - g. Kardesha Bradley, DOC – OGC
 - h. Toni Parham, NOAA, Office of Chief Administrative Officer (OCAO); and

¹² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/noaa-budget-cut-climate-research-draft-proposal/>.

¹³ <https://www.eenews.net/articles/noaa-employees-offered-financial-incentive-to-quit-before-layoffs/>.

4. All documents and communications (including, but not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, comments, notes, analyses, legal and other memoranda, letters, telephone logs, Signal messages, meeting minutes, calendar entries, PowerPoint slides, and presentation materials) exchanged between any members of the group of officials referenced in item 3 and any employee of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) regarding the preparation, finalization, or decision to act based upon, the aforementioned list of NOAA probationary employees referenced in item 1.

Additionally, we are requesting that Vice Admiral Hann provide a briefing to Committee staff in order to detail her knowledge of the probationary employee list, its provenance, and the circumstances surrounding its finalization and implementation. We request that this briefing take place no later than May 29th, 2025. The agency should begin to coordinate with Committee staff regarding the scheduling of Vice Admiral Hann's briefing upon its receipt of this letter.

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."¹⁴ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over "environmental research and development... marine research ... outer space, including exploration and control thereof," and the National Weather Service.¹⁵ If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Josh Schneider or Kristi Parrott 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



Emilia Sykes
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

¹⁴ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

¹⁵ *Id.*

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

Chairman Scott Franklin
Subcommittee on Environment

Chairman Rich McCormick
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight