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PAUL D. TONKO

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
20<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, NEW YORK

September 10, 2019

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE  
CHAIR, SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT  
AND CLIMATE CHANGE  
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS  
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AND PUBLIC LANDS  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE,  
AND TECHNOLOGY  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

Dr. Cynthia J. Decker, Scientific Integrity Officer  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Dr. Decker,

I am writing to request a formal investigation by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) into actions allegedly taken by Administration appointees following President Trump's unsupported public statements about Hurricane Dorian path projections, in order to determine precisely whether these actions violated the NOAA Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity.

Recent reporting in *The New York Times*, conducted by three veteran political reporters who cite multiple sources with knowledge of the acts in question, indicates that political leadership responsible for overseeing NOAA may have communicated threats and applied political pressure in an effort to suppress the release of vital, current forecasting information critical to emergency preparedness. I have also received evidence of an agency-wide directive sent on September 1, 2019 restricting National Weather Service (NWS) from releasing information that could be seen as contradicting President Trump's false claim that Alabama would "most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated," even as forecast guidance indicated that the state was not at risk. This was reportedly followed by an unsigned statement on September 6, 2019 attributed only to NOAA generally that supported the president's scientifically groundless assertions.

When the National Weather Service office in Birmingham, Alabama identified the presence of inaccurate information about the storm, it clarified to the public that Alabama would not see any impacts from Hurricane Dorian. Following this correction, the office was rebuked by NOAA in a September 6, 2019 statement attributable to an unnamed NOAA spokesperson, who asserted that the Birmingham office "spoke in absolute terms that were inconsistent with probabilities from the best forecast products available at the time." Since its release, numerous former NOAA leaders as well as meteorologists around the country have criticized NOAA's statement for its rebuke of the Birmingham office, and voiced concerns about political interference in science. *The Washington Post* reported that NOAA's acting Chief Scientist Craig McLean found that this "intervention to contradict the forecaster was not based on science but on external factors including reputation and appearance, or simply put, political," and that he will be pursuing potential violations of the NOAA Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity.

Countless state and local leaders, first responders, emergency managers and American households depend on the communication of clear, scientifically sound information by the National Weather Service to make critical and sometimes life-saving decisions. The NOAA Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity has instituted measures to ensure that such science conducted by the agency is safeguarded from interference. The order states clearly that NOAA employees, whether political appointees or civil servants, must not “intimidate or coerce employees, contractors...into altering or censoring scientific findings” or “suppress, alter, or otherwise impede the timely release of scientific or technological findings or conclusions unless explicitly required by a Department or government-wide statute, regulation, Executive Order, Presidential Memorandum, or other legal authority.”

As one of America’s foremost scientific agencies responsible for supporting public safety, NOAA’s policy of upholding scientific integrity standards is one of the most important in our federal government. The reported abuses by high-ranking political appointees, in contravention of agency convention and best practices, appear to violate the NOAA Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity. This policy exists for the very purpose of preventing political interests from interfering with the agency’s protection of the safety and welfare of the American people.

Accordingly, I ask NOAA to follow the guidance of your own Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity, which says it is intended to strengthen widespread confidence in the quality, validity, and reliability of NOAA science, and uphold your agency’s commitment to support for science, the safety of the American people and the official duties of your employees. I respectfully request you open an investigation into this matter immediately.

Should any employee or contractor of NOAA experience retaliation in relation to this matter, Congress will exercise its oversight authority and will expect NOAA to fully investigate such subsequent violations of your agency’s scientific integrity policy.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul D. Tonko". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long horizontal stroke at the end.

PAUL D. TONKO  
Member of Congress