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AND CREDIT

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U.S. House of Representatives
Rep. Sharice L. Davids
Kansas Third District

April 22, 2026

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

The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

The Honorable Kenneth Graham
Director
National Weather Service
1325 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Secretary Lutnick, Administrator Jacobs, and Director Graham,

I write following recent severe weather and EF-2 tornadoes with peak winds of 125 miles per hour that hit my home community, Kansas' Third District. While I am grateful there were no fatalities, that outcome should not obscure a more serious reality: Kansans were put at risk by failures in forecasting and warning systems that are meant to protect them.

In a state like Kansas, timely and accurate weather data is not optional — it is lifesaving.

Nearly a year ago, I raised concerns about staffing shortages and operational disruptions at the National Weather Service (NWS) following actions taken by this administration. I asked how you would maintain 24/7 operations, ensure consistent weather balloon launches, and preserve forecasting accuracy. After ten months, my office has received no response. Now, we are seeing the consequences.

Reporting indicates that on the morning of these storms, multiple NWS offices in the region did not conduct standard 7:00 a.m. weather balloon launches — a critical input for forecasting severe weather. Just hours before tornadoes touched down, the Storm Prediction Center identified no tornado threat in northeast Kansas. And the tornado watch for impacted areas was issued far later than normal — within an hour of touchdown.

Weather balloon data is essential to understanding atmospheric conditions in real time. When that data is missing — whether due to staffing shortages or operational decisions — forecasting

accuracy suffers. When forecasting accuracy suffers, warning times shrink. And when warning times shrink, families are put in danger.

The fact that Kansans avoided catastrophic loss in this instance does not excuse these breakdowns — it underscores how close we came, and what could happen if these failures continue.

These irresponsible decisions at the NWS have direct, real-world consequences for the safety of communities across Kansas and the country. Kansans should not have to wonder whether the systems designed to protect them are fully operational when severe weather strikes.

My constituents deserve clear answers and immediate action to ensure this does not happen again. Therefore, I respectfully ask you to provide answers to the following questions within 30 days of receipt:

- Did stations in and around Kansas not launch morning weather balloons on April 13, 2026? If so, what was the reason for these missing launches?
- Did this lack of weather balloon launches contribute to a delayed tornado watch in northeast Kansas? If not, what do you attribute this delay to?
- Is the NWS implementing permanent changes to twice-a-day weather balloon launches? If so, how are you justifying this change in schedule?
- How often does the NWS launch supplemental midday weather balloons? Does the NWS have the resources and partnerships with relevant university programs to increase these supplemental launches?
- What current staff vacancies exist at the following NWS Weather Forecast Offices: Pleasant Hill, Topeka, Wichita, Springfield, Dodge City, Goodland, and Hastings?
- What is the current staffing level of the overall NWS? How many meteorology and forecasting positions is the Service looking to fill? How does the number of meteorologists and forecasters at the NWS compare today to April 20, 2024?

Kansans rely on the National Weather Service to provide timely, accurate warnings that save lives. The gaps we saw in this storm cannot become the new normal. I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress