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

June 17, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Lutnick,

I write to you today regarding the operability and staffing of the National Weather Service (NWS), which has been severely hampered by the Trump administration. As you know, the NWS provides critical weather forecasting, warnings, data, and more and touches the life of every single American. This year, my home state of Kansas has been hit with significant bouts of severe storms, damaging wind, extreme flooding, and devastating tornadoes – including some earlier this month. According to Storm Prediction Center data, there have already been 946 tornadoes nationwide as of June 9, which is just 109 shy of the historical record through this date.

Americans across the country are faced with power outages, property damage, expensive cleanup costs, and the loss of family and friends; farmers – who rely heavily on weather data – are worse off without NWS forecasting in the midst of planting season. Meanwhile, the Trump administration has downsized NWS staff by the hundreds and implemented a government-wide hiring freeze currently in place through the middle of July. As a result, several of the NWS' 122 Weather Forecast Offices are unable to conduct 24/7 operations, including the facility in Goodland, Kansas, which services more than 80,000 people in three states. In fact, just days after the Goodland facility ceased around-the-clock services, an EF-3 tornado touched down just one hour away. The Pleasant Hill, Missouri office – which services much of my district – is dealing with several meteorology vacancies.

Additionally, the NWS has decreased the number of twice daily weather balloon launches around the country. These reductions, due to staff shortages and a lack of helium supply, undermine the collection of detailed weather model data that helps create daily forecasts, predict severe storms, and more. These staffing and forecasting cuts come on the heel of workforce shortages at the NWS under previous administrations and as the agency has struggled to meet its annual tornado warning accuracy goal (72 percent) since 2012.

During your testimony before the Senate recently, you stated, “We care about meteorologists. We care about hydrologists. Under no circumstances am I going to let public safety or public forecasting be touched.” While I am grateful to know that the NWS has now been exempted from the current hiring freeze, your testimony is not in line with your agency’s actions to date.

Earlier this month, the NWS announced it was taking several steps to mitigate staffing challenges nationwide, including reassigning current National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) employees to NWS field locations and hiring 126 permanent meteorologists, physical scientists, hydrologists, and electronics technicians. This clearly demonstrates that the Trump administration’s scorched-earth approach to the federal workforce was reckless, dangerous, and inefficient.

As my constituents look to be reassured of public safety and the operations of the NWS. I respectfully ask you to provide answers to the following questions within 30 days of receipt:

- What is NOAA doing to ensure the 126 new NWS positions are filled as quickly as possible, and how does NOAA plan to ensure that the work of any reassigned employees is not abandoned?
- How has the geographic distribution of these new positions been determined, and how will it impact NWS staffing in Kansas and surrounding states?
- Are there any plans for additional NWS hiring after these 126 positions are filled?
- What is your plan and timeline to restore 24/7 operations to the Weather Forecast Office in Goodland, Kansas?
- What resources does the NWS need to restore twice daily weather balloon launches nationwide, and what is your plan to meet staffing needs to do so?
- To what degree has the administration engaged with relevant university programs to assist in weather balloon launches and provide meteorology students with valuable field experience?
- How does your administration plan to stabilize NWS operations to prevent communication outages, upgrade forecasting software and hardware, and – ultimately – improve severe storming warning accuracy?

Every single person in this country relies on the NWS in their daily lives. This agency is a top priority for public safety and national security, and indiscriminate cuts have only worsened the success of our nation’s weather forecasting.

I appreciate your urgent attention to this matter and look forward to working with your Department to restore and improve NWS operations for the benefit of all Americans. Should you have any questions or concerns, please contact Eric Dunay in my office at eric.dunay@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress