

RICHARD C. SHELBY, ALABAMA, CHAIRMAN

MITCH McCONNELL, KENTUCKY
LAMAR ALEXANDER, TENNESSEE
SUSAN M. COLLINS, MAINE
LISA MURKOWSKI, ALASKA
LINDSEY GRAHAM, SOUTH CAROLINA
ROY BLUNT, MISSOURI
JERRY MORAN, KANSAS
JOHN HOEVEN, NORTH DAKOTA
JOHN BOOZMAN, ARKANSAS
SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO, WEST VIRGINIA
JAMES LANKFORD, OKLAHOMA
STEVE DAINES, MONTANA
JOHN KENNEDY, LOUISIANA
MARCO RUBIO, FLORIDA
CINDY HYDE-SMITH, MISSISSIPPI

PATRICK J. LEAHY, VERMONT
PATTY MURRAY, WASHINGTON
DIANNE FEINSTEIN, CALIFORNIA
RICHARD J. DURBIN, ILLINOIS
JACK REED, RHODE ISLAND
JON TESTER, MONTANA
TOM UDALL, NEW MEXICO
JEANNE SHAHEEN, NEW HAMPSHIRE
JEFF MERKLEY, OREGON
CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, DELAWARE
BRIAN SCHATZ, HAWAII
TAMMY BALDWIN, WISCONSIN
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY, CONNECTICUT
JOE MANCHIN, III, WEST VIRGINIA
CHRIS VAN HOLLEN, MARYLAND

SHANNON HUTCHERSON HINES, STAFF DIRECTOR
CHARLES E. KIEFFER, MINORITY STAFF DIRECTOR

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025

<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

September 9, 2019

Inspector General Peggy E. Gustafson
U.S. Department of Commerce
Office of the Inspector General
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Inspector General Gustafson:

I write to express my concerns about the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) statement dated September 6, 2019, that reprimands National Weather Service (NWS) experts in the Birmingham Weather Forecast Office (WFO) for communicating to the public that Hurricane Dorian would not impact Alabama. The Birmingham WFO statement corrected President Donald Trump's contention that Hurricane Dorian would severely impact the state. I am deeply troubled that NOAA is politicizing weather prediction critical for the protection of life and property in contravention of internal operations services and policy directives. I believe that the NOAA statement seeks to silence NOAA meteorologists and I request that you investigate whether it violates the agency's Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity (NAO 202-735D).

On September 1, 2019, President Trump tweeted that the State of Alabama "will most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated" by Hurricane Dorian. However, the NWS experts, including those at the National Hurricane Center, were already reporting that Alabama was outside of the forecast storm track. At this point in time, it was already known that the storm would remain off the Florida coast before heading up the Atlantic seaboard. To prevent public confusion and to clarify to emergency managers who rely on NOAA weather predictions for critical decisions about evacuations and disaster preparedness, the Birmingham WFO tweeted "Alabama will NOT see any impacts from [Hurricane Dorian]."

NOAA released a statement September 6, 2019, attributable to an unnamed spokesperson supporting the President's assertion and undermining the Birmingham WFO, stating "The Birmingham National Weather Service's Sunday morning tweet spoke in absolute terms that were inconsistent with probability from the best forecast products available at the time." I believe that NOAA released this statement to defend the President's position, while ignoring the best available science. This statement violates NOAA's internal scientific integrity order. NAO 202-735D states that all staff, including political and career, "must preserve the integrity of the scientific activities it conducts." This includes, "In no circumstance may any NOAA official ask or direct Federal scientists or other NOAA employees to suppress or alter scientific findings."

NOAA's September 6, 2019, statement could have a detrimental effect on future forecasts during extreme weather events if meteorologists are concerned about political repercussions from storm predictions. The public must have confidence that forecasts are based on scientific, not political, models. I request that you investigate whether this statement violated NOAA's Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity or any other relevant statutes. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeanne Shaheen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Jeanne Shaheen
Vice Chair
Subcommittee on Commerce,
Justice, Science and Related Agencies