

September 26, 2025

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick,

Extreme weather poses a direct and increasing threat to lives and livelihoods across the country. Yet, the Trump administration's attacks on federal employees and the critical services they provide have resulted in numerous vacancies at the National Weather Service (NWS) for "mission-critical" positions, which desperately need to be filled by qualified meteorologists. But instead of focusing on hiring qualified civil servants, the Administration is applying a loyalty test, asking applicants questions about their devotion to President Trump. When assessing candidates for these important public safety roles, putting political fealty above competence will endanger lives. This shameful cult-of-personality approach to governance must end.

On January 20, 2025, President Trump issued an executive order titled, ironically, "Reforming the Federal Hiring Process and Restoring Merit to Government Service."¹ Now, in implementing that executive order, the Administration is requiring candidates for NWS meteorologist positions to show their alignment with President Trump on issues having nothing to do with meteorology and everything do with fealty. One question asks applicants which Trump executive orders inspire them: "How would you help advance the President's Executive Orders and policy priorities in this role? Identify one or two relevant Executive Orders or policy initiatives that are significant to you, and explain how you would help implement them if hired."²

¹ Exec. Order No. 14,170, 90 Fed. Reg. 8621 (Jan. 20, 2025),
<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/30/2025-02094/reforming-the-federal-hiring-process-and-restoring-merit-to-government-service>.

² National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Announcement Number
NWS-25-12788406-DHA,
https://apply.usastaffing.gov/ViewQuestionnaire/12788406?_gl=1*kkd7t4*_ga*Mjg3NDk3NTMxLjE3NTc0NTI2O TA.*_ga_CLZB1LJ1VZ*cZ3NTgwMzM4OTgkbzMkZzAkDE3NTgwMzM4OTgkajYwJGwwJGgw.

Another seeks the applicants' insights into the Constitution, undoubtedly to ensure they comport with President Trump's: "How has your commitment to the Constitution and the founding principles of the United States inspired you to pursue this role within the Federal government?"

These are bizarre questions to be asking applicants for positions as meteorologists. From vaccine skepticism to climate change denial, the Trump administration is treating science as just another partisan hoax. Now, the NWS is seeking to staff critical weather forecasting positions with applicants handpicked for their devotion to President Trump instead of their knowledge of atmospheric science. We need a next generation of meteorologists who understand weather models, not sycophants substituting spin for science.

According to the job posting, this position is a permanent, competitive civil servant role, not a political appointment.³ It involves analyzing and integrating weather, water, and climate data to create accurate and timely forecasts, warnings, and advisories that highlight societal risks. The position also supports decision-making services for public safety partners through tailored products, briefings, and deployments, while collaborating with colleagues to enhance operational effectiveness at Weather Forecast Offices and National Centers. Technical qualifications are all that should matter.

Perhaps none of this should be surprising coming from a President who in 2019 proudly displayed a map of Hurricane Dorian's projected path that he altered with a Sharpie pen to include the state of Alabama—which was never in the storm's path.⁴ But it is dangerously unacceptable. So, in order for me to better understand how NWS intends to fill these "mission-critical" meteorologist positions consistent with its mission,⁵ please respond in writing to the following questions by October 7, 2025:

1. How is a meteorologist candidate's view of specific executive orders or the Constitution relevant to their ability to conduct reliable forecasting, assist in disaster preparedness and response, and protect public safety?
2. Has the introduction of political loyalty questions affected the size or quality of the applicant pool for NWS meteorologist positions? If so, how?
3. Does an otherwise qualified candidate's refusal to answer the questions disqualify them for the position?
4. Who within the Administration or NWS was responsible for drafting and approving these application questions, and what role did NWS scientific leadership play in the process?

³ USAJobs Announcement, Meteorologist, Dep't of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, <https://www.usajobs.gov/job/844171200>.

⁴ Toluse Olorunnipa & Josh Dawsey, 'What I said was accurate!': Trump stays fixated on his Alabama error as hurricane pounds the Carolinas (Sept. 5, 2019), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/what-i-said-was-accurate-trump-stays-fixated-on-his-alabama-error-as-hurricane-pounds-the-carolinas/2019/09/05/32597606-cfe7-11e9-8c1c-7c8ee785b855_story.html.

⁵ Anthony Edwards, *Meteorologists now face a Trump 'loyalty test' when applying to National Weather Service jobs*, San Francisco Chronicle (Aug. 27, 2025), <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/politics/meteorologists-now-face-a-trump-loyalty-test-when-applying-to-national-weather-service-jobs/ar-AA1Lm0rF>.

5. Do you believe it is lawful to use a political litmus test or consider an applicant's political ideology when hiring for a civil service position? Why do you believe it is appropriate?
6. Would NWS fire a meteorologist for expressing views critical of this Administration on their own time and with their own resources?
7. What safeguards, if any, has the NWS put in place to ensure that political considerations do not undermine the accuracy, timeliness, or integrity of forecasts, warnings, and advisories?
8. Given that these positions directly affect public safety, how does the NWS plan to reassure state and local emergency management officials, first responders, and the public that meteorologists are being hired and promoted based on science and competence, not political loyalty?

Thank you in advance for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward J. Markey". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line drawn underneath the name.

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator