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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE,  
AND TRANSPORTATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6125

WEBSITE: <http://commerce.senate.gov>

February 11, 2020

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

Dear Inspector General Gustafson:

I write to request an update on your progress in investigating scientific integrity concerns and potential misconduct at the Department of Commerce in relation to Hurricane Dorian forecast activities.<sup>1</sup>

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation will soon be considering the nomination of Dr. Neil Jacobs to serve as Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).<sup>2</sup> Because Dr. Jacobs was serving in an acting capacity at the time, your findings regarding scientific integrity or potential misconduct are highly relevant for Committee members as they review his nomination.

On January 31, 2020, at approximately 10 PM, NOAA released over 1000 pages of emails related to Hurricane Dorian as requested by media outlets under the Freedom of Information Act.<sup>3</sup> Some of these emails are heavily redacted, but may contain information that is of time-sensitive interest to the Committee. For example, one e-mail dated September 4, 2019, from Julie Roberts to Dr. Jacobs has five straight lines of text redacted. The only text that remains reads, "Likelihood of tropical storm-force winds." Given questions as to whether and how an official National Hurricane Center forecast product was altered, the contents of this email and others are material to the Committee's ability to thoroughly advise on Dr. Jacobs' confirmation.

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<sup>1</sup> See "A Message from Craig McLean: Hurricane Dorian and Exceptional Service," dated September 10, 2019, *available at* <https://research.noaa.gov/article/ArtMID/587/ArticleID/2489/A-Message-from-Craig-McLean-Hurricane-Dorian-and-Exceptional-Service>.


<sup>2</sup> PN1331, received in the Senate and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on January 6, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See "Hurricane Dorian-related records: Third Interim Release," *available at* <https://www.noaa.gov/foia/reading-room/hurricane-dorian-related-records/third>.

The issue of scientific integrity and any potential misconduct by officials at NOAA in the wake of Hurricane Dorian is critical to the Committee's ability to perform its Constitutionally mandated review of Dr. Jacob's nomination. Therefore, I am requesting that you provide a briefing to my staff on the status of your investigation thus far. If possible, please schedule the briefing as soon as possible by contacting either Sara Gonzalez-Rothi or Christopher Day at 202-224-0411.

Thank you in advance for your prompt consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell