



# U.S. SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL WASHINGTON

## Correcting Commerce Secretary Lutnick's Statements at the 6/4/2025 & 6/5/2025 Appropriations Hearings

Topic	Lutnick (6/4/25)	Facts
Staffing shortages at the National Weather Service	<i>"We are fully, fully staffed. There are no openings on the National Hurricane Center. Zero. It is fully staffed. We are fully ready for hurricane season. And our meteorologists are fully staffed."</i>	According to the National Weather Service Employee Organization, the National Hurricane Center in Miami has at least five vacancies as of last week.
Not cutting instruments and data	<i>"At NOAA, we are transforming how we track storms and forecast weather with cutting edge technology, but remember, not cutting any instruments or data. We're adding, we're improving understanding of how hurricanes intensify."</i>	The Administration is cutting or eliminating many instruments and data through contract and grant cancellations and the proposed FY2026 funding cuts.
Staffing of hydrologists, who work alongside meteorologists to model and predict flooding	<i>"We have not cut any hydrologists, which are the people that study the water."</i>	According to the National Weather Service, there are currently 40 to 50 vacancies for hydrologists.
Contracts for hurricane hunters	<i>"They come to me with planes. Hurricane hunters. And they said they're said they're \$672 million. And I said wow, how many do we get? And they said we get two. Two planes? Wow. Can I see the plane? Just show me a picture of this plane. And they show me a picture of a plane. You remember old planes they have like mullions and the windscreen and three propellers on each side. And I said my god, when was this plane new."</i>	Secretary Lutnick's comments seem to be referring to NOAA's aging fleet of hurricane hunter aircraft that are in desperate need of replacement, not the new aircraft they plan to acquire.

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**Contracts for Hurricane Hunters: Page 5-6**

## On staffing shortages at the National Weather Service

**Secretary Lutnick (6/4/25 to Senate Appropriations Committee):** *"The department employs 2,100 meteorologists and hundreds of other forecasters. This is less than 5%. We are fully, fully staffed. There are no openings on the National Hurricane Center. Zero. It is fully staffed. We are fully ready for hurricane season. And our meteorologists are fully staffed."*

### Vacancies at the National Hurricane Center

Hurricane season started on June 1<sup>st</sup>, and according to the National Weather Service Employee Organization, the National Hurricane Center in Miami has at least five vacancies as of last week:

- 1340 GS13 Hurricane Specialist Job - issues track intensity and size forecasts for storms.
- 1340 GS13 Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch (TAFB) Meteorologist Job - issues marine forecasts and warnings for the whole Atlantic basin and the eastern Pacific. Also estimates intensities of tropical storms every 6 hours that the Hurricane Specialist uses.
- 1340 GS12 TAFB surface analysis job. Introductory job where people learn how to do surface and tropical wave analysis and train up to work the GS13 desks and fills in as necessary, especially for big events where everyone contributes positively for media, DSS etc.
- 1340 GS13 and a GS12 Technology and Science Branch (TSB) positions - Maintains and updates operational software and is the go-to if something breaks, plus researches new scientific methods for operations. Also, critical mass for 24h support during a tropical storm event.

**Secretary Lutnick (6/5/25 to House Appropriations Committee):** *"The National Weather Service employs 2,100 meteorologists. Less than 130 took early retirement. It is fake news and inappropriate to suggest a single meteorologist or hydrologist was fired. That is preposterous and silly. Less than 5% chose to retire, and we using these responsibly...Commerce Department sought and were granted the ability to hire those people, the same number. So we will have no reduction in force. Our National Hurricane Center has full staff."*

### Overall Vacancies

According to the National Weather Service Employees Organization, the National Weather Service has already lost 566 people since January 2025 – compared to losing about 600 employees over a prior 15-year period. They are reassigning 155 existing staff from other areas of the Agency. The Administration also just approved their plan to hire an additional 126 people. **Neither of these actions have been completed, but even if they had been, that would still leave the Agency hundreds of personnel short.**

At the beginning of 2025, NWS had approximately 4,300 federal employees. As of April 30, 2025, NWS was below their necessary staff level by 18% and below their normal staffing level by 33%.

### NWS staff losses in 2025 are due to the following:

- 97 probationary employees fired,
- 164 opted in to the Deferred Retirement Program,
- 285 opted in to Voluntary Early Retirement Program (VERA) or Voluntary Separation Incentive Program (VSIP), and
- 20 lost through attrition.

## On not cutting instruments and data

**Secretary Lutnick (6/5/25):** *“All weather collection technology is in full force and effect. Our satellites. Our balloons. All sources are in full force and effect.”*

The following Weather Forecast Offices (WFOs) have suspended all weather balloon launches due to staff shortages:

- Kotzebue, Alaska;
- Omaha, Nebraska; and
- Rapid City, South Dakota.

Six WFOs have already reduced weather balloon launches from twice to once per day:

- Aberdeen, South Dakota;
- Grand Junction, Colorado;
- Green Bay, Wisconsin;
- Gaylord, Michigan;
- North Platte, Nebraska; and
- Riverton, Wyoming.

**Secretary Lutnick (6/4/25):** *“At NOAA, we are transforming how we track storms and forecast weather with cutting edge technology, but remember, not cutting any instruments or data. We’re adding, we’re improving understanding of how hurricanes intensify.”*

**The Administration’s proposed FY2026 funding cuts would eliminate NOAA’s Integrated Ocean Observing System (“IOOS”), their major buoy and related sensor System.**

NOAA IOOS is a national-regional network that collects and delivers real-time ocean and coastal data to support weather, safety, commerce, and ecosystems. Commercial and recreational fisheries, cruise ships, freighter and tanker pilots, and the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard all use the information to navigate harbors safely, plot courses around storms, and conduct search-and-rescue operations. The data is also used in National Weather Service forecasts, including hurricane models which require sea surface temperature, tsunami coastal escape route planning, hurricane intensity tracking, and harmful algal bloom detection, among many other applications. Data is also used by fishery managers to map fish distributions, such as albacore tuna.

**Because of staffing shortages at the National Centers for Environmental Information, many critical data sources have gone offline.**


For example, NOAA will no longer provide their Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disaster report<sup>1</sup> because the staff that worked on the report are no longer at the Agency<sup>2</sup>. This report previously showed that just last year, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information, there were 27 weather disaster events that cost over \$1 billion each and resulted in 568 deaths. Another example is the end of NOAA’s monitoring of Arctic sea ice and snow cover<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncei.noaa.gov/access/billions/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/08/climate/noaa-billion-dollar-disasters.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://alaskabeacon.com/2025/05/07/trump-administration-stopping-noaa-data-service-used-to-monitor-sea-ice-off-alaska/>




National Centers for  
Environmental Information  
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate  
Disasters

Home / Climate Monitoring / Billions

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In alignment with evolving priorities, statutory mandates, and staffing changes, NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information (NCEI) will no longer be updating the Billion Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters product. Additional details and the opportunity to submit comments are available at the [NESDIS Notice of Changes website](#). All past reports, spanning 1980-2024, and their underlying data remain authoritative, archived, and available via the [Billion-Dollar Disasters dataset landing page](#).

**The Administration has endangered the continuity of satellite observation capability, both with the existing fleet, and upcoming GeoXO mission.**

The National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service, which manages NOAA’s satellite fleet, has lost 181 employees, down 36% from typical levels. The Administration reversed a decision to defer satellite upkeep after backlash<sup>4</sup>. The Administration’s FY26 Passback also directs NESDIS to “immediately cancel all major instrument and spacecraft contracts on the GeoXO program.” The [GeoXO program](#) is the next generation satellite system that will replace the current GOES-R satellites, and provide critical data on weather, climate, oceans, and space weather. A delay in the GeoXO program will lead to a gap in coverage of these critical satellites. And removal of any of the instruments planned for inclusion would greatly decrease our forecasting of severe weather, hurricanes, and wildfires, and remove our ability to monitor from satellites lightning, wildfire ignitions, air quality and smoke, harmful algal blooms, oil spill tracking, and much more.

You can find a list of product and service cuts from the National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service here: <https://www.nesdis.noaa.gov/about/documents-reports/notice-of-changes>.

**NOAA research vessels operated by the Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (“OMAO”) are critically understaffed due to the hiring freeze impacting credentialed mariners.**

Due to the failure to secure a hiring freeze exemption to date, NOAA will have to leave at least 30% of its ships tied up at the docks, instead of conducting research, because they do not have enough staff to operate the ships. That may result in at least 500 sea days of research cancelled this fiscal year. That will reduce data collection on a number of critical data streams including fishery stock assessment surveys needed for fisheries management, charting and mapping needed for navigation and post-storm assessments, decreased presence and research capacity in the Arctic regions, and other data crucial for NOAA operations.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/amid-trump-cuts-noaa-halts-upkeep-of-critical-weather-satellites/>

## On staffing of hydrologists

**Sec. Lutnick (6/4/25):** *"We have not cut any hydrologists, which are the people that study the water."*

According to the National Weather Service, there are currently 40 to 50 vacancies for hydrologists.

The Agency has not disclosed how these vacancies occurred, but the National Weather Service has lost a huge swath of its employees under this Administration. According to the National Weather Service Employee Organization, 600 employees left NWS over a 15-year period, either by attrition or retirement. They have already lost 566 in just the first 60-75 days of this year.

## On contracts for Hurricane Hunters

**Sec. Lutnick (6/4/25):** *"I'll give you one example. They come to me with planes. Hurricane hunters. And they said they're said they're \$672 million. And I said wow, how many do we get? And they said we get two. Two planes? Wow. Can I see the plane? Just show me a picture of this plane. And they show me a picture of a plane. You remember old planes they have like mullions and the windscreen and three propellers on each side. And I said my God, when was this plane new..."*

**Secretary Lutnick's comments seem to be referring to NOAA's aging fleet of hurricane hunter aircraft that are in desperate need of replacement, not the new aircraft they plan to acquire.**

NOAA has consistently reported that it has limited options to extend the service life of its aging aircraft with reach or exceed their service life by 2030 as the aircraft approach almost 50 years in service.

On several occasions NOAA's aircraft have been grounded or unable to complete their mission for technical or maintenance issues. For example, in the 24 hours before Hurricane Idalia made landfall in Florida, NOAA had to ground its last remaining Hurricane Hunter due to a generator failure.

Hurricane Hunters provide critical data required for forecasting storms in the Eastern, North, and South Pacific and the North Atlantic basins. These specialized aircraft are flown into extreme storms, including hurricanes and atmospheric rivers, by NOAA and the Air Force Reserve's 53<sup>rd</sup> Weather Reconnaissance Squadron to gather data needed to accurately model and better predict storm tracks and intensity before they impact American communities.

**There are no other platforms (aircraft or otherwise) that can collect this type of data. The data from Hurricane Hunters are vital to public safety and economic and national security.**

There is clear bipartisan bicameral Congressional support for hurricane hunter procurements. NOAA published an updated Aircraft Plan in 2022 that identifies an operational requirement to procure four new Hurricane Hunter aircraft. Recognizing the increasing threat of atmospheric rivers and other storms, Congress authorized up to six Hurricane Hunters in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 (P.L. 117-81).

Appropriations for aircraft procurement in recent years include:

- \$120 million in FY18,
- \$20 million in FY21,
- \$13 million in FY22 with an additional \$100 million in the Inflation Reduction Act,

- \$4 million in FY23 with an additional \$327.7 million in the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act,
- \$4.5 million FY24, and a net increase of \$9 million from reprogramming.

These two new aircraft will replace the existing Hurricane Hunters that will be out of service in 2030. Any delay will result in a gap in service that will decrease the accuracy of hurricane forecasts including intensity, storm track, and other information needed by forecasters, emergency managers, and the public ahead of a storm.

These aircraft are costly because of the custom instrumentation and design required to complete their missions—which require them to repeatedly fly inside hurricanes and other extreme storm systems. Additionally, the four-engine aircraft with multiple wing propellers is an aircraft design with proven suitability for flying in and researching hurricanes.