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To: Louis Uccellini; Mary Erickson - NOAA Federal; Andrea Bleistein; George Jungbluth - NOAA Federal; Jeremy Andrucyk - NOAA Federal
Subject: Rolling Stone: Being Right when Trump Is Wrong Is Apparently a Fireable Offense

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Being Right when Trump Is Wrong Is Apparently a Fireable Offense

Trump's Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross threatened to fire top employees if they didn't fit their hurricane forecast to President Trump's lie about Alabama

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross threatened on Friday to fire top employees at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration after its Birmingham office contradicted President Trump's false statement about Alabama being endangered by Hurricane Dorian.

The storm is linked to at least 44 deaths in the Bahamas and at least eight total in North Carolina and Florida.

The New York Times first reported the news of Ross' threat on Monday, and the report explains the unsigned retraction that NOAA issued at the end of last week.

"The Birmingham National Weather Service's Sunday morning tweet spoke in absolute terms that were inconsistent with probabilities from the best forecast products available at the time," read the September 6th statement.

Later, the Washington Post reported that NOAA staff were instructed in an agency-wide directive to "only stick with official National Hurricane Center forecasts if questions arise from some national level social media posts which hit the news this afternoon" and encouraged not to "provide any opinion."

"I have never been so embarrassed by NOAA," wrote National Weather Service Employees Organization president Dan Sobien on Friday night. "What they did is just disgusting."

That Sunday tweet that NOAA belatedly sought to disown had declared that "Alabama will NOT see any impacts from Dorian. We repeat, no impacts from Hurricane Dorian will be felt across Alabama." That proved to be the case, as the hurricane struck the southeastern seaboard of the United States, including Florida and the Carolinas, throughout the middle of last week with Category 1 strength.

Yet Trump has remained steadfast, asserting that Alabama had been forecast as in the path of the storm and has gone to absurd lengths to attempt to prove the veracity of his claim. The president has used his Twitter feed to promote this falsehood, including releasing a heavily edited video of a CNN weatherman mentioning Alabama while discussing Dorian. Most notoriously, Trump reportedly used a Sharpie to doctor an official map that he displayed inside the Oval Office, all in an attempt to enhance the storm's swell.

A senior administration official told the Times that what actually happened is that NOAA initially got it wrong and later corrected the record, suggesting without evidence that the original forecast "had been

motivated by a desire to embarrass the president more than concern for the safety of people in Alabama,” according to the Times.

The Times report added that Louis Uccellini, the director of the National Weather Service — a NOAA subsidiary — “got a standing ovation from conference attendees when he praised the work of the Birmingham office and said staff members there had acted ‘with one thing in mind, public safety’ when they contradicted Mr. Trump’s claim that Alabama was at risk.”

But even if some nefarious meteorologist really did have it out for Trump, it doesn’t explain how could Trump would possibly know more about the storm than the scientists at NOAA’s Birmingham office. He claimed to be relying upon the agency’s forecasts, after all. How could he have had the level of certitude he claimed?

What seems most likely, given the Times report and the Trump administration’s propensity to lie, is that an official government agency charged with giving the public reliable information about dangerous weather contradicted its own scientists to release that Friday statement — and we now know that they did so under pressure from a Cabinet secretary.

The Times reports that Ross intervened on Friday, according to three people familiar with his actions, phoning acting NOAA administrator Neil Jacobs to instruct him to fix the contradiction between the agency’s Sunday tweet declaring Alabama safe and the president’s lie. After Jacobs initially refused, Ross told him that NOAA’s political staff — including Jacobs — would be fired if he did not comply.