

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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September 5, 2019

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump,

I write regarding a video released by the White House Twitter account yesterday afternoon.¹ In the video, you held a placard showing a forecast of Hurricane Dorian, originally issued on August 29, altered to suggest that the hurricane was forecasted to impact Alabama. Hurricane Dorian is an ongoing threat to public safety as the storm continues its path up the eastern seaboard.² In times of emergency, the American public need to have confidence in the information being provided by the White House, and misrepresentation of National Weather Service (NWS) forecasts is especially disturbing when it concerns an ongoing natural disaster that has already killed twenty people.

That video was unfortunately preceded by an earlier claim that hurricane Dorian was on track to hit Alabama.³ Despite receiving a briefing from the Acting Director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on August 31, you tweeted on September 1, "In addition to Florida – South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, will most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated."⁴ By September 1, the National Weather Service (NWS) had already issued more updated projections that clearly showed Hurricane Dorian moving up the eastern seaboard. The National Weather Service of Alabama had to issue a clarifying message via Twitter later that

¹ The White House, "President @realDonaldTrump gives an update on Hurricane #Dorian," Twitter, September 4, 2019, accessed here: <https://twitter.com/WhiteHouse/status/1169300628000124929>

² "Tracking Hurricane Dorian," CNN, September 4, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/storm-tracker/>

³ Matthew Cappicci and Andrew Freedman, "President Trump showed a doctored hurricane chart. Was it to cover up for 'Alabama' Twitter flub?" *Washington Post*, September 4, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2019/09/04/president-trump-shows-doctored-hurricane-chart-was-it-cover-up-alabama-twitter-flub/>

⁴ President Donald Trump, "In addition to Florida - South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama, will most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated. Looking like one of the largest hurricanes ever. Already category 5. BE CAREFUL! GOD BLESS EVERYONE!" Twitter, September 1, 2019, accessed here: <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1168174613827899393>

day, stating, "Alabama will NOT see any impacts from #Dorian. We repeat, no impacts from Hurricane #Dorian will be felt across Alabama. The system will remain too far east."⁵

It is misleading and potentially harmful for the American people to be given outdated weather information regarding an imminent threat. But I am also concerned that someone on your staff apparently assisted in modifying NWS graphics about the storm. As you know, altering an NWS map and presenting it to the public is a likely violation of 18 U.S. Code § 2074.⁶ The portion of the projection extending into Alabama on the rendering you presented yesterday was apparently drawn onto a previously-issued NWS image, complete with official NOAA and NWS logos.

Yet whether or not any law was violated in the alteration of the NWS forecast map, the result is a misrepresentation of what the NWS data is telling forecasters, sowing confusion that could adversely impact our citizens' ability to prepare for a deadly weather emergency. While the Oval Office has an important role to play in promoting preparedness by our citizens in the face of approaching hurricanes, I think it vitally important that all parties leave the forecasting of hurricanes' paths to the skilled professionals at the National Weather Service.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

⁵ NWS Birmingham, "Alabama will NOT see any impacts from #Dorian. We repeat, no impacts from Hurricane #Dorian will be felt across Alabama. The system will remain too far east. #alwx" Twitter, September 1, 2019, accessed here: <https://twitter.com/NWSBirmingham/status/1168179647667814400>

⁶ 18 U.S. Code § 2074, Legal Information Institute, accessed here: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2074>