Christopher Vaccaro - NOAA Federal

From:	Christopher Vaccaro - NOAA Federal
Sent:	Monday, September 9, 2019 11:06 AM
To:	Golembo, Max
Cc:	Susan Buchanan
Subject:	Re: FW: Wash Post: NOAA chief scientist says he's investigating the agency's response to Trump tweets // NOAA staff warned in Sept. 1 directive against contradicting Trump

Yes, that's fine. In addition, the NWS has this statement:

> "The NWS leadership team stands with the entire National Weather Service workforce and will continue to uphold the scientific integrity of the forecast process as it was skillfully applied by all NWS offices last week to ensure public safety first and foremost." - National Weather Service Spokesperson

On Mon, Sep 9, 2019 at 11:02 AM Golembo, Max <Max.Golembo@abc.com> wrote:

> I can share this with ABC network?
>
> **From:** Christopher Vaccaro - NOAA Federal [mailto:christopher.vaccaro@noaa.gov]
> **Sent:** Monday, September 09, 2019 10:59 AM
> **To:** Golembo, Max <Max.Golembo@abc.com>
> **Subject:** Re: FW: Wash Post: NOAA chief scientist says he's investigating the agency's response to Trump tweets // NOAA staff warned in Sept. 1 directive against contradicting Trump
>
> Hi- Yes, here is the message that Craig sent yesterday to his employees at NOAA Research:
>
> > Dear Colleagues,
> >
> > The fierce storm we know as Hurricane Dorian has concluded its ferocious path through the Bahamas and along the US East Coast. Many of you have contributed to the excellent science that has underpinned the forecasts and current understanding of storms such as this one, which accelerated quite rapidly in intensity. The storm also presented challenges in track which improved with enhanced observations. We know that our collective work, from the scientists in the aircraft penetrating the storm, to the scientists deploying the glider picket line, to the modelers and folks working the physics of the

storms, across OAR and in our CI's, and across all NOAA Lines, we are working the problem in order to give the NWS forecasters the best tools we possibly can to keep America and our neighbors safe. Thank you.

During the course of the storm, as I am sure you are aware, there were routine and exceptional expert forecasts, the best possible, issued by the NWS Forecasters. These are remarkable colleagues of ours, who receive our products, use them well, and provide the benefit of their own experience in announcing accurate forecasts accompanied by the distinction of all credible scientists -- they sign their work. As I'm sure you also know, there was a complex issue involving the President commenting on the path of the hurricane. The NWS Forecaster(s) corrected any public misunderstanding in an expert and timely way, as they should. There followed, last Friday, an unsigned press release from "NOAA" that inappropriately and incorrectly contradicted the NWS forecaster. My understanding is that this intervention to contradict the forecaster was not based on science but on external factors including reputation and appearance, or simply put, political. Our NOAA Scientific Integrity Policy and Code of Scientific Conduct make clear that all NOAA employees shall approach all scientific activities with honesty, objectively, and completely, without allegiance to individuals, organizations, or ideology. The content of this press release is very concerning as it compromises the ability of NOAA to convey life-saving information necessary to avoid substantial and specific danger to public health and safety. If the public cannot trust our information, or we debase our forecaster's warnings and products, that specific danger arises.

You know that the value of our science is in the complexity of our understanding, our ability to convey that understanding to a wide audience of users of this information, and to establish and sustain the public trust in the truth and legitimacy of that information. Unfortunately, the press release of last Friday violated this trust and violated NOAA's policies of scientific integrity. In my role as Assistant Administrator for Research, and as I continue to administratively serve as Acting Chief Scientist, I am pursuing the potential violations of our NOAA Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity. Thankfully, we have such policies that are independently cited as among the best in the federal community, if not the best. Your NOAA and OAR management and leadership team believes in these policies and principles. I have a responsibility to pursue these truths. I will.

Thank you for your continued excellent work, and your trust. Carry on.

Craig

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Craig N. McLean
Assistant Administrator
Oceanic and Atmospheric Research

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

On Mon, Sep 9, 2019 at 10:56 AM Golembo, Max <Max.Golembo@abc.com> wrote:

> Happy Monday!
>
> Do you know anything about this?
>
> Can you help them with any contact?
>
> ---
>
> **From:** Hosford, Matt A.
> **Sent:** Monday, September 09, 2019 10:45 AM
> **To:** #ABCTV Weather Meteorologists <ABCTV.Weather.Meteorologists@disney.com>
> **Subject:** FW: Wash Post: NOAA chief scientist says he's investigating the agency's response to Trump tweets // NOAA staff warned in Sept. 1 directive against contradicting Trump
>
> If anyone has a contact at NOAA that would share this email we could use the help.
>
> Thanks.
>
> ---
>
> **From:** "Hosford, Matt A." <Matt.A.Hosford@abc.com>
> **Date:** Monday, September 9, 2019 at 10:30 AM
> **To:** #ABCTV Weather All <ABCTV.Weather.All@disney.com>
> **Subject:** FW: Wash Post: NOAA chief scientist says he's investigating the agency's response to Trump tweets // NOAA staff warned in Sept. 1 directive against contradicting Trump

From: "Carden, Dee W." <Dee.W.Carden@abc.com>
Date: Monday, September 9, 2019 at 10:28 AM
To: "Hemingway, Ahmad J." <Ahmad.J.Hemingway@abc.com>, #ABCTV News DC Political Unit Main <ABCTVDLNewsPoliticalUnitMain@disney.com>
Subject: Wash Post: NOAA chief scientist says he's investigating the agency's response to Trump tweets // NOAA staff warned in Sept. 1 directive against contradicting Trump

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's acting chief scientist said in an email to colleagues Sunday that he is investigating whether the agency's response to President Trump's Hurricane Dorian tweets constituted a violation of NOAA policies and ethics.

In an email to NOAA staff that was obtained by The Washington Post, the official, Craig McLean, called the agency's response "political" and a "danger to public health and safety."

President Trump's incorrect assertion on Sept. 1 that Alabama "would most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated" set off a chain of confusion and outrage among the public, and within NOAA. At the time, the National Weather Service's forecast guidance showed only a very small risk (about 5 percent) of tropical storm-force winds for a small portion of Alabama. However, Alabama was not in the storm forecast track from the National Hurricane Center, which showed Hurricane Dorian skirting the East Coast.

While the NWS's Birmingham office quickly corrected the president on Sept. 1 without naming him, NOAA officials caused an internal uproar on Sept. 6 when the agency issued an unsigned statement that defended Trump's false claim about Alabama and admonished the Weather Service's Birmingham division for speaking "in absolute terms."

Scientists attacked NOAA officials for conceding to Trump during a weather emergency, when accuracy and messaging are vital to keep the public safe. The American Meteorological Society issued a statement of support for the NWS, writing: "AMS believes the criticism of the Birmingham forecast office is unwarranted; rather they should have been commended for their quick action based on science in clearly communicating the lack of threat to the citizens of Alabama."

In his email to employees Sunday, McLean criticized his agency's public statement, saying it prioritized politics over NOAA's mission.

“The NWS Forecaster(s) corrected any public misunderstanding in an expert and timely way, as they should,” McLean wrote. “There followed, last Friday, an unsigned press release from 'NOAA’ that inappropriately and incorrectly contradicted the NWS forecaster. My understanding is that this intervention to contradict the forecaster was not based on science but on external factors including reputation and appearance, or simply put, political.”

He also wrote that “the content of this press release is very concerning as it compromises the ability of NOAA to convey life-saving information necessary to avoid substantial and specific danger to public health and safety."

“If the public cannot trust our information, or we debase our forecaster’s warnings and products, that specific danger arises,” McLean wrote.

As a result, McLean told his staff that “I am pursuing the potential violations of our NOAA Administrative Order on Scientific Integrity."

“I have a responsibility to pursue these truths,” he added. “I will.” McClean has extensive experience in NOAA’s ocean programs, and is also an attorney who has practiced marine resource law. He has been awarded the Department of Commerce Silver and Bronze Medals, among other accolades.

Agency officials did not immediately provide comment to The Post on Monday.

The confusion around Trump’s statements has caused a maelstrom within the some of the government’s most vital scientific agencies. Trump continued to double down on his initial false claim about Alabama that week and displayed an altered map where the so-called “cone of uncertainty” had been altered with a Sharpie to include the state.

The agency also appeared to try to correct the record without angering the president. According to emails obtained by The Post, prior to the statement on Friday, NOAA staff were instructed 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 not to “provide any opinion" in response to President Trump’s initial Alabama tweets.

The agency sent a similar message warning scientists and meteorologists not to speak out on Sept. 4, after Trump showed a hurricane map from Aug. 29 modified with a hand-drawn, half-circle in black Sharpie around Alabama.

From: Hemingway, Ahmad J.
Sent: Sunday, September 08, 2019 3:44 AM
To: #ABCTV News DC Political Unit Main <ABCTVDLNewsPoliticalUnitMain@disney.com>
Subject: Flagging WAPO report // NOAA staff warned in Sept. 1 directive against contradicting Trump

https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/noaa-staff-warned-in-sept-1-directive-against-contradicting-trump/2019/09/07/12a52d1a-d18f-11e9-87fa-8501a456c003_story.html

Nearly a week before the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration publicly backed President Trump over its own scientists, a top NOAA official warned its staff against contradicting the president.

In an agencywide directive sent Sept. 1 to National Weather Service personnel, hours after Trump asserted, with no evidence, that Alabama "would most likely be hit (much) harder than anticipated," staff was told 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."

They were also told not to "provide any opinion," according to a copy of the email obtained by The Washington Post.

A NOAA meteorologist who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution said the note, understood internally to be referring to Trump, came after the National Weather Service office in Birmingham contradicted Trump by tweeting Alabama would "NOT see any impacts from the hurricane."

The Birmingham office sent the tweet after receiving a flurry of phone calls from concerned residents following Trump's message.

The agency sent a similar message warning scientists and meteorologists not to speak out on Sept. 4, after Trump showed a hurricane map from Aug. 29 modified with a hand-drawn, half-circle in black Sharpie around Alabama.

"This is the first time I've felt pressure from above to not say what truly is the forecast," the meteorologist said. "It's hard for me to wrap my head around. One of the things we train on is to dispel inaccurate rumors and ultimately that is what was occurring — ultimately what the Alabama office did is provide a forecast with their tweet, that is what they get paid to do."

An NWS spokesperson said, “NWS leadership sent this guidance to field staff so they (and the entire agency) could maintain operational focus on Dorian and other severe weather hazards without distraction.”

Late Friday afternoon, NOAA officials further angered scientists within and beyond the agency by releasing a statement, attributed to an unnamed agency spokesperson, supporting Trump’s claims on Alabama and chastising the agency’s Birmingham meteorologists for speaking in absolutes.

That statement set off a firestorm among scientists, who attacked NOAA officials for bending to Trump’s will.

“This looks like classic politically motivated obfuscation to justify inaccurate statements made by the boss. It is truly sad to see political appointees undermining the superb, lifesaving work of NOAA’s talented and dedicated career servant,” said Jane Lubchenco, who served as NOAA administrator under President Barack Obama.

NOAA, which oversees the National Weather Service, isn’t the first agency in the Trump administration to publicly side with the president after he has doubled down on a widely disputed claim.

But the firestorm surrounding the president’s hurricane statements is unprecedented in the organization’s history, and threatens to politicize something that most Americans take for granted as an objective, if flawed, part of daily life: the weather forecast.

A NOAA official familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly, disputed the suggestion that the statement took sides, saying there was “no political motivation” behind it.

The official said agency leadership had considered making a statement for “a day or two” to clear up confusion. Acting NOAA administrator Neil Jacobs was involved in drawing up the statement as was the NOAA director of public affairs, Julie Kay Roberts, who has experience in emergency management and worked on the president’s campaign.

The leadership of the Commerce Department, headed by Secretary Wilbur Ross, also approved the release, though Ross was out of the country at the time.

The official said the statement called out Birmingham’s tweet because one

NOAA hurricane forecast product showed a 5 to 20 percent chance of tropical-storm-force winds in a small part of Alabama.

“It was nothing against Birmingham, we needed to make sure forecast products reflect probabilistic guidance,” the official said, referencing the extremely low odds for tropical storm-force winds.

Such wind speeds, between 39 and 74 mph, rarely cause much damage or require the advance preparation.

The NOAA statement made no reference of the fact that when Trump tweeted that Alabama was at risk, the state was not in the National Hurricane Center’s “cone of uncertainty,” which forecasters use to determine where the storm is most likely to hit. Alabama also had not appeared in the cone in the days before that.

The acting NOAA director briefed the president on Hurricane Dorian on Aug. 29, using the forecast cone that the White House later adapted via Sharpie marker.

The director of the National Hurricane Center briefed the president on the storm’s likely track again on Sept. 1, shortly after his tweet about the threat to Alabama.

At other times, Trump was briefed by individuals, including the White House homeland security and counterterrorism adviser, who lacked the meteorological expertise to interpret what they were showing.

“If the president had been briefed by someone who understands the forecast, he never would’ve mentioned Alabama,” the NOAA official said.

NOAA’s Friday statement infuriated scientists, who worry the Trump administration is corroding faith in research and data.

“It makes me speechless that the leadership would put [Trump’s] feelings and ego ahead of putting out weather information accurately,” said Michael Halpern, a deputy director at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “If we’re politicizing the weather what is there left to politicize? We’re seeing this kind of clamp down of scientists across the government, and it’s been an escalating trend.”

In 2018, a survey of scientists at 16 federal agencies found a culture of fear and

self-censorship in an administration that has sidelined scientific evidence, especially as it related to climate change, in favor of political expediency.

Keith Seitter, executive director of the American Meteorological Society, said in a statement that "the criticism of the Birmingham forecast office is unwarranted; rather they should have been commended for their quick action based on science in clearly communicating the lack of threat to the citizens of Alabama."

One of the strongest reactions to the NOAA statement came from David Titley, an atmospheric scientist who served as the chief operating officer of NOAA under Obama.

"Perhaps the darkest day ever for leadership. Don't know how they will ever look their workforce in the eye again. Moral cowardice," he tweeted.

Others who weighed in on social media were also scathing in their response to NOAA's decision to publicly defend Trump.

"I have never been so embarrassed by NOAA. What they did is just disgusting," Dan Sobien, president of the National Weather Service's labor union, wrote on Twitter Friday. "Let me assure you the hard working employees of the NWS had nothing to do with the utterly disgusting and disingenuous tweet sent out by NOAA management tonight."

A popular television broadcast meteorologist in Birmingham also came to the defense of his city's National Weather Service team.

"The tweet from NWS Birmingham was spot on and accurate," James Spann tweeted. "If they are coming after them, they might as well come after me. How in the world has it come to this?"

On Saturday, the National Weather Service leadership seemingly tried to address the outcry in an all-hands letter to its employees to thank them for their hard work during the hurricane. The letter, obtained by The Washington Post, assured employees they were valued.

"We want to assure you that we stand behind our entire workforce and the integrity of the forecast process, including the incredible scientific, technical and engineering skill you demonstrated for this event," the NWS leadership wrote. "We saw first hand that our integrated forecast process works, and we continue to embrace and uphold the essential integrity of the entire forecast process as it was applied by ALL NWS offices to ensure public safety first and

foremost.”

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