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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND
URBAN AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6075

September 23, 2026

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick:

I write to request information about the Department of Commerce's (Commerce or the Department) decision to remove the ban on political interference in its scientific integrity policy¹ amid ongoing concerns about the Department's politicizing and misusing data, statistics, and reports on the nation's demographics and its economy.

Commerce's actions threaten the accuracy and reliability of statistics collected and produced by the Department's agencies, including the Census Bureau and Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), which produce data upon which policymakers—including the Federal Reserve—and businesses rely to analyze the economy and make critical decisions impacting households. Amid the Trump Administration's broader assault on the integrity of the nation's statistical system, in which you and the Department have played a key role, you owe the public a clear explanation of why the Department removed this language and how it arrived at this decision.

On August 19, 2026, Commerce's Office of Privacy and Open Government (OPOG) quietly issued a directive that opens the door for political interference in its scientific reports and activities.² Specifically, the updated policy eliminated commitments to protect against data "suppres[ion] [delay], or alter[ation]" and it omits "independent review of facilities, methodologies, and other scientific activities as appropriate to ensure scientific integrity."³ Just as previous versions did, the revised policy applies to Commerce and its agencies, including the Census Bureaus and the BEA, both of which produce key data used by the Fed for economic analyses.⁴ BEA produces GDP and the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index,

¹ NPR, "Trump officials cut political interference ban after unusual Census Bureau report," Hansi Lo Wang, August 31, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/08/31/nx-s1-5948057/department-commerce-census-bureau-scientific-integrity>.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*; U.S. Department of Commerce, Office of Privacy and Open Government, Policy Directive on Scientific Integrity, January 15, 2025, https://web.archive.org/web/20260117134635/https://www.commerce.gov/opog/directives/DAO_216-23.

⁴ NPR, "Trump officials cut political interference ban after unusual Census Bureau report," Hansi Lo Wang, August 31, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/08/31/nx-s1-5948057/department-commerce-census-bureau-scientific-integrity>.

the Fed's preferred inflation gauge, while Census data provides data on population and demographics used to assess and contextualize economic trends.⁵

The revised policy was issued only one day after the Census Bureau published a “highly unusual”⁶ report making unsubstantiated claims about noncitizen voting in the 2020 election and a few weeks before the Trump Administration proposed to “stop using the census to ask about people’s race and ethnicity, a topic that the national tally has included since the first count in 1790.”⁷ That and other proposed changes would have sweeping implications for the quality of our economic data, the redistricting process that determines congressional representation, the Federal Reserve’s monetary policy decisions that rely upon key employment statistics and BEA inflation data, and our ability to enforce civil rights and other laws.⁸

This is not an isolated incident. Indeed, you appear to be using the Department to wield an unprecedented influence over the nation’s election system.⁹ You quietly installed at the Census political operatives from the America First Policy Institute (AFPI), a think tank founded by Office of Management and Budget Director Vought.¹⁰ These individuals reportedly cut off communication with career experts in July and ultimately produced the report on the 2020 election that caught “even high-ranking Census Bureau officials [...] off guard.”¹¹ You then publicly touted the false report as “just the beginning.”¹²

These developments follow a string of attacks against the United States’ statistical system, many of which you have been involved in:

- In March 2025, the Administration terminated key advisory committees at BEA, the Census, and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) that employed external experts who were tasked with recommending ways to improve and modernize economic data.¹³ One expert called this a “significant setback for the Census Bureau,” but you dismissed the

⁵ Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, “What Is PCE? Explaining the Fed's Preferred Inflation Measure,” David Pendered, May 20, 2026, <https://www.atlantafed.org/what-we-study/inflation/2026/05/20/what-is-pce-explaining-the-feds-preferred-inflation-measure>; U.S. Census Bureau, “Our Censuses,” <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/censuses.html>.

⁶ CNN, “Experts slam Trump’s unusual new census report as a ‘hijack by the White House’,” Gabe Cohen and Fredreka Schouten, August 20, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/08/20/politics/flawed-census-report-alleged-noncitizen-voting>.

⁷ NPR, “Trump officials propose sweeping changes to the census that would reshape voting maps,” Hansi Lo Wang, September 10, 2026, <https://www.npr.org/2026/09/09/nx-s1-5845147/trump-us-census-citizenship-question-race-categories>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ CNN, “Trump’s Commerce Secretary under pressure to use his powers to block voting machines,” Gabe Cohen, Jeremy Herb, Sean Lyngaas, and Phil Mattingly, September 10, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/09/10/politics/howard-lutnick-commerce-department-trumps-election-agenda>.

¹⁰ Peterson Institute for International Economics, “Political meddling at the Census Bureau damages the entire US statistical system,” Jed Kolko, September 1, 2026, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/2026/political-meddling-census-bureau-damages-entire-us-statistical-system>.

¹¹ CNN, “Trump’s Commerce Secretary under pressure to use his powers to block voting machines,” Gabe Cohen, Jeremy Herb, Sean Lyngaas, and Phil Mattingly, September 10, 2026, <https://www.cnn.com/2026/09/10/politics/howard-lutnick-commerce-department-trumps-election-agenda>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ Politico, “‘Bad sign’: Purge of data experts raises alarms over economic reports,” Sam Sutton, March 21, 2025, <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/21/labor-commerce-department-economy-data-doge-00241559>.

usefulness of these Committees.¹⁴ Specifically, about the advisory committees at the Census, you said their purposes “ha[d] been fulfilled.”¹⁵

- In August 2025, President Trump fired BLS Commissioner, Dr. Erika McEntarfer, based on false claims that she “rigged” employment data “in order to make the Republicans, and [Trump], look bad.”¹⁶ You responded to the firing by asserting that employment data would “get better” because “you’ll take out the people who are just trying to create noise against the president.”¹⁷ Around the same time, you also argued that the independence at federal statistical agencies is “nonsense.”¹⁸
- By October 2025, amid Trump’s government shutdown, the BLS canceled the release of its full monthly jobs report for the first time in the agency’s history.¹⁹
- On June 24, 2026, BEA announced changes to how several components of the PCE price index are calculated, which economists predict will likely lower recent inflation readings.²⁰ The “opacity regarding [the changes] has raised some eyebrows” and came as “economists and investors are on high alert for any sign of political interference in economic data from President Trump or his appointees.”²¹
- Also in June 2026, Commerce announced changes to data confidentiality when it barred the use of “noise infusion,” a common method that statistical agencies use to publish local demographic and industry data that does not reveal the confidential information of individual persons or businesses.²² The decision to bar noise infusion data was seemingly made without the consultation of career staff or scientific experts, and experts have noted that the move may undermine the accuracy of certain data, and “spell the end of a wide swath of data from the Census Bureau, including key statistics used for redistricting, policymaking and research.”²³ The decision also led Census to delay release of its annual

¹⁴ AP, “Census Bureau under Trump cuts loose expert advisers who work for free,” Mike Schneider, March 4, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/census-bureau-commerce-department-howard-lutnick-3a56003b790aedce6e6c8ddd7c6b6943>.

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ AP News, “Trump removes official overseeing jobs data after dismal employment report,” Christopher Rugaber and Josh Boak, August 1, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-jobs-firing-f00e9bf96d0110519be9bf4f3ec89195>; Truth Social Post by President Donald J. Trump, @realDonaldTrump, August 1, 2025, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/114954846612623858>.

¹⁷ CNBC, “Job reports will get more accurate, Lutnick predicts before BLS reveals sluggish August hiring,” Kevin Breuninger, September 5, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/09/05/trump-bls-jobs-lutnick.html>.

¹⁸ Government Executive, “After firing of BLS chief, Lutnick tells federal statisticians that independence is ‘nonsense’,” Eric Katz, August 12, 2025, <https://www.govexec.com/management/2025/08/after-firing-bls-chief-lutnick-tells-federal-statisticians-independence-nonsense/407404/>.

¹⁹ CNBC, “White House says October jobs and inflation data may never be released because of the shutdown,” Jeff Cox, November 12, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/11/12/white-house-october-data-release.html>.

²⁰ Reuters, “Methodology changes could lower US May core PCE inflation, economists say,” June 29, 2026, <https://www.reuters.com/business/methodology-changes-could-lower-us-may-core-pce-inflation-economists-say-2026-06-29/>.

²¹ Wall Street Journal, “A Statistical Revamp Is About to Lower Inflation, at a Critical Time,” Matt Grossman, July 19, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/economy/central-banking/pce-inflation-data-updates-ca7bfd61>.

²² Department of Commerce, Office of Privacy and Open Government, “Disclosure Avoidance for Statistical Products,” June 4, 2026, <https://www.commerce.gov/opog/disclosure-avoidance-statistical-products>.

²³ Dataindex.us, “A New Commerce Policy Could Mean Less Public Data, Not Better Public Data,” Christopher Steven Marcum, Meghan Maury, and Beth Jarosz, June 11, 2026, <https://dataindex.us/newsletter/article/5ed3272e-9a35-4f38-881b-c62ad45d6a56>; NPR, “A Trump push to cut ‘statistical noise’ could mean less data from the Census Bureau,” Hansi Lo Wang, June 12, 2026,

American Community Survey—data critical to policymakers, nonprofits, and the private sector, and that underpin planning, investment decisions, and funding for public services.²⁴

It is more important than ever that you publicly explain and justify the Department's decisions to change the scientific integrity policy that guides decisions that affect every American household. To better understand these policy changes and how the Department of Commerce arrived at its revised language, I request detailed answers to the following questions by no later October 7, 2026:

1. Provide a comprehensive summary explaining why Commerce removed language banning political interference from the scientific integrity policy governing its agencies.
2. Was Commerce's August 19, 2026 revision to the scientific integrity policy prompted by the Census Bureau's noncitizen voting report, that was released the day before? Please explain.
3. When did Commerce begin revising the policy, and who ordered it?
4. Does this revision reflect a broader shift in how Commerce will handle political interference across its agencies, or is it specific to this incident?
5. How will the Department commit to protecting Commerce's data — including BEA's GDP and inflation-related data — from political interference? Please explain.
6. Has the Commerce department made — or considered making — any additional changes to how the Census or BEA conduct, review, or release their work?
7. How many individuals affiliated with the America First Policy Institute or other outside political organizations have been placed in a position at the Census Bureau, BEA, or elsewhere within Commerce's statistical agencies? Please provide their titles, responsibilities, and whether they underwent the same vetting and hiring process as career staff.
8. Did any career staff raise objections or concerns, formally or informally, about the removal of the political-interference language before the policy was revised? If so, please describe those objections and how they were addressed.
9. Has any career employee at Census or BEA been reassigned or separated from the agencies in connection with the noncitizen voting report, the PCE methodology changes, or the noise infusion decision?

<https://www.npr.org/2026/06/12/nx-s1-5855734/census-bureau-data-differential-privacy>.

²⁴ Peterson Institute for International Economics, "Political meddling at the Census Bureau damages the entire US statistical system," Jed Kolko, September 1, 2026, <https://www.piie.com/blogs/realtime-economics/2026/political-meddling-census-bureau-damages-entire-us-statistical-system>; Letter from League of Women Voters to Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, September 4, 2026, <https://www.lwv.org/lwvus-joins-letter-urging-release-acs-data>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth Warren", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Elizabeth Warren
Ranking Member
Committee on Banking,
Housing, and Urban Affairs