

October 14, 2026

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick:

I am writing to raise urgent concerns about the Department of Commerce's efforts to erode federal safeguards against political interference after its recent update to its Scientific Integrity Policy. Millions of Americans, local communities, and small businesses rely on reliable, nonpartisan data from the Department of Commerce.

The Department's recent decision in August 2026 to quietly strip explicit prohibitions against political interference from its Scientific Integrity Policy is yet another attempt by the Trump administration to undermine scientific facts and data that do not align with its own priorities. Removing these guardrails opens the door to partisan influence in public data that is used to help inform everything from census counts to inflation metrics and hurricane forecasts. Doing away with these safeguards could also result in biased reports that violate federal law under the Information Quality Act, which requires agencies to maintain the quality, objectivity, and integrity of the information they share with the public.

According to reporting by National Public Radio (NPR), this policy revision follows the U.S. Census Bureau's publication of an unauthored, highly irregular report on noncitizen voting. Data and elections experts have widely criticized the report's underlying methodology and noted a complete lack of standard peer review. Critically, NPR found that the America First Policy Institute, which has well-documented ties to Donald Trump, led the report's development. If partisan external political entities are permitted to shape agency findings, such collaboration violates long-standing integrity standards and raises fundamental questions about whether Commerce Department leadership is actively prioritizing political narratives over statutory compliance.

The Department's actions directly contradict the frameworks set by Trump's own administrations. In 2019, Trump signed the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act into law, establishing required statistical independence. In March 2025, he issued Executive Order 14303 ('Restoring Gold Standard Science'), which explicitly mandated federal data to be transparent, peer-reviewed without bias, and free from conflicts of interest. Circumventing peer review to release partisan reports, while also removing restrictions on political interference, could violate both the statutory requirements Trump signed into law and the executive orders his administration claims to uphold.

Furthermore, the timing of these changes raises significant concerns surrounding the Trump administration's attempts to politically influence the upcoming 2030 Census in an effort to suppress political participation of Trump's political opponents and reallocate federal funding for at-risk communities. The risk of partisan influence in public data extends far beyond the Census Bureau. The Department of Commerce oversees critical scientific and economic entities, including the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, and the National Institute of Standards and Technology, that the American public, businesses, and policymakers rely on for unbiased data. Federal analysts must be free to ensure their methodologies are mathematically and scientifically sound, without fear of political retaliation or pressure to align with Donald Trump's political agenda. Undermining these protections threatens the core credibility of the entire federal statistical system.

Given these serious concerns around the Commerce Department's rollback of political interference prohibitions, I ask that you respond to the following questions in writing by no later than November 9, 2026:

1. What specific internal review process prompted the Department to update its Scientific Integrity Policy and remove existing language prohibiting political interference?
2. In light of recent revisions to the Department of Commerce's Scientific Integrity Policy and the publication of the unreviewed Census Bureau report on noncitizen voting, how does the Department maintain compliance with published data meeting the statutory requirements of "quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity" under the Information Quality Act?
3. To what extent, if any, has the Department of Commerce or its subordinate agencies, including the U.S. Census Bureau, permitted non-governmental advocacy organizations, partisan think tanks, or external political entities to author, advise on, or influence the methodology, data analysis, drafting, or review of statistical reports following the recent revisions to the Department's Scientific Integrity Policy?
4. In light of Executive Order 14303's mandate requiring unbiased peer review and freedom from conflicts of interest, what specific evaluation has the Department conducted to confirm whether the Census Bureau's recent report on noncitizen voting met these standards prior to publication?
5. Did the America First Policy Institute, its affiliates, or individuals currently or formerly affiliated with the Institute contribute to, draft, advise on, or review the U.S. Census Bureau's report regarding noncitizen voting?
 - a. If so, what was the exact scope and nature of their involvement, and were any such individuals granted access to non-public datasets, administrative records, or information protected under section 9 of Title 13—the federal privacy law that strictly prohibits the sharing of private household census data with unauthorized entities?

Sincerely,

Ron Wyden

Ron Wyden

United States Senator