

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 23, 2025

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

The Honorable Laura Grimm
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
1401 Constitution Ave NW, Room 5128
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick, and Acting Administrator Grimm,

We write to express our concern with recent layoffs at the National Weather Service (NWS). Reports indicate that over 550 employees have been terminated or accepted deferred resignation offers.¹ We believe that these staff reductions pose a threat to public safety and emergency preparedness by undercutting essential forecasting and weather monitoring systems. We urge you to reinstate terminated NWS employees and request additional information on how the administration plans to address staffing at NWS.

NWS maintains 122 weather forecast offices across the United States which are responsible for providing 24/7 weather monitoring and forecasts. NWS would be unable to provide accurate and timely forecasts without sufficient staffing levels at weather forecast offices nationwide. In addition to daily forecasting operations, weather forecast offices are responsible for issuing emergency weather warnings ahead of events such as major floods, wildfire hazards, hurricanes, and blizzard conditions. As the frequency and severity of such disasters increase,² maintaining NWS's real-time forecasting operations is essential to saving lives³ and reducing the cost of recovery for disaster-affected communities.⁴

¹ *Former National Weather Service Leaders Warn About "loss of life" from NOAA Cuts*. CBS News. (May 5, 2025). (Online at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/former-national-weather-service-leaders-letter-noaa-cuts/>).

² NASA, *Extreme Weather and Climate Change*. (Online at: <https://science.nasa.gov/climate-change/extreme-weather/>)

³ On May 2, 2025, five former NWS directors, who worked under both Republican and Democratic administrations from 1988-2022, published an open letter highlighting the safety concerns associated with these staffing cuts. To this time, NWS officials have not responded. (Online at: <https://www.nbcnews.com/science/science-news/former-national-weather-service-directors-push-back-cuts-rcna204897>).

⁴ In 2024 alone, NOAA recorded 27 individual weather and climate disasters in the United States with at least \$1 billion in damages. 2024 was second only to the record-setting 28 billion-dollar disasters in 2023. The total cost of

NWS employees and the programs they support are essential to the safety of the millions of Americans impacted by storms and disasters each year. On February 27, 2025, 108 probationary NWS employees were terminated, adding to the 170 staff who accepted the Administration's "deferred resignation" plan earlier that month.⁵ These staffing cuts are already impacting NWS services, forcing NWS to halt weather balloon launches in New York, Maine, and Alaska that provide daily weather data to meteorologists at weather forecast offices across the country.⁶ As we head into hurricane season, 30 weather forecast offices are without a meteorologist-in-charge, one is completely without any managers at all, and nearly a dozen are preparing to shut down 24/7 services without immediate action to address shortages.⁷

The Department of Commerce is reportedly planning to eliminate an additional 1,000 staff from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), including at NWS, in the coming weeks. All told, NWS offices, already suffering from staffing constraints, could see a 15% reduction in force just months into 2025.⁸

We request a response to the following questions by June 10, 2025:

1. How many of the NWS regional weather forecast offices were impacted by terminations or deferred resignations since January 20, 2025? Please provide a list of affected offices, including how many staff departed and how many remain.
2. With reports of at least one weather forecast office in Goodland, Kansas stopping 24/7 operations due to staffing shortages, how do the Department of Commerce and NOAA plan to maintain continued 24/7 operation of forecasting offices without requiring excessive overtime hours from staff?
3. With a requested budget cut of \$1.311 billion for NOAA's overall budget, and a \$209 million cut for NWS procurement of weather satellites and infrastructure⁹, how does the Department of Commerce and NOAA plan to ensure adequate staffing and preparedness in the midst of worsening storm seasons, increasing heat waves, and changing weather patterns?

these 27 events was over \$182 billion. (Online at: <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2024-active-year-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters>).

⁵ *NWS offices face vacancy crisis as more cuts loom, union says*. Politico Greenwire. (March 12, 2025). (Online at: <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/03/12/nws-offices-face-vacancy-crisis-as-more-cuts-loom-union-says-00226149>).

⁶ Public Information Statement 25-11. National Weather Service. (March 7, 2025). (Online at: https://www.weather.gov/media/notification/pdf_2025/pns25-11_intermittent_suspension_of_raob_Launches-aly_gyx.pdf).

⁷ *US weather forecasting is more crippled than previously known as hurricane season nears*. CNN. (May 2, 2025). (Online at: <https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/02/weather/nws-forecasting-layoffs-trump>).

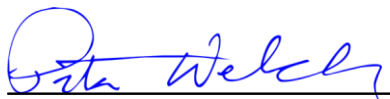
⁸ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/noaa-potentially-cut-more-than-1000-additional-employees-doge/>.

⁹ Letter from Director Russell Vought to Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Susan Collins. (May 2, 2025). (Online at: <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpegclclefindmkaj/https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf>).

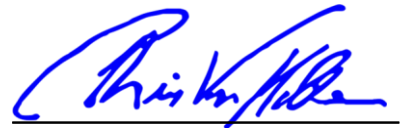
4. As NWS employees are critical to public safety, especially heading into hurricane season, will the Department of Commerce grant an exemption to the hiring freeze to fill these crucial positions?

We urge you to reassess the staffing needs at NOAA and NWS and reinstate terminated probationary employees swiftly. We appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Peter Welch
United States Senator



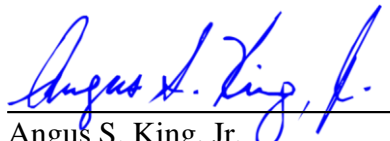
Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator



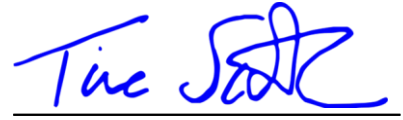
Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



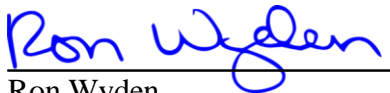
Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Tina Smith
United States Senator



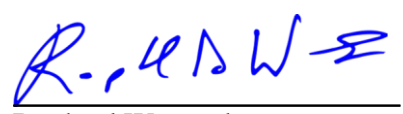
Ron Wyden
United States Senator



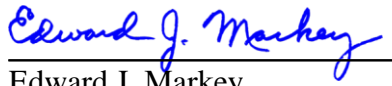
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator



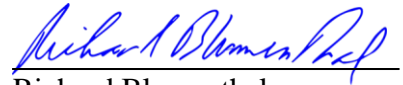
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



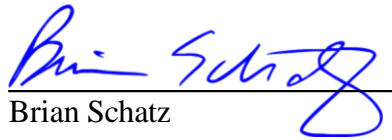
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Brian Schatz
United States Senator

cc: Ken Graham, Director, National Weather Service