

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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May 19th, 2025

The Honorable Russell T. Vought
Director
Office of Management and Budget
725 17th St. NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dear Director Vought,

We write to you in defense of a critical public safety agency currently being strangled by the policies of the Trump Administration. The National Weather Service (NWS) saves lives. It provides essential weather forecasts that alert Americans to extreme weather events. It coordinates with local officials and emergency responders to prepare for extreme weather and minimize the resulting dangers to life and property. And it delivers weather forecast information that Americans rely on each and every day to make basic decisions and plan their lives. It is simply indispensable; if the NWS does not perform these tasks, nobody else will. But the NWS is only as strong as its people. The NWS workforce is withering away because of this administration's policies: indiscriminate firings; repeated offers of "deferred resignation" and early retirement accompanied by threatened mass layoffs and hostile attacks on federal workers; and on top of it all, a hiring freeze that prevents the hiring of new employees to fill vacancies in critical public safety jobs across the country. Inexplicably, President Trump has refused to exempt NWS from the government-wide hiring freeze by designating it as a public safety department, despite the obvious and essential role it plays in protecting public safety during extreme weather events. As a result, NWS faces a profound crisis. The administration is playing with fire, and the American people are the ones who will get burned – literally, in the case of wildfires like the ones that tore through southern California earlier this year. As the start of hurricane season looms, we implore you to lift the hiring freeze for NWS before it is too late and allow the agency to hire the meteorologists, scientists, and technicians that it needs to carry out its mission and keep the American people safe.

The evisceration of the NWS workforce is a story that has sadly become all too familiar throughout the federal government since January 20th. NWS has long been understaffed, and the struggles of its aging, overburdened workforce have been well documented.¹ NWS employees have worked heroically in recent years to make sure the agency is capable of fulfilling its essential functions despite chronic staffing shortages. But the last four months have ushered in an

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-17-364>; <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-103792>.

unprecedented and frightening assault that has pushed the NWS workforce past its breaking point. In February, the so-called “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE) orchestrated the illegal firings of NWS probationary employees alongside their colleagues throughout the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).² Between February and May, the Department of Commerce (DOC) made repeated offers of “deferred resignation” and early retirement that were designed to intimidate as many employees as possible into leaving federal employment of their own accord.³ Amidst it all, the threat of a large-scale “reduction in force” – a mass firing – has hung over the NWS, demoralizing the workforce and pushing employees to leave before being summarily fired.⁴

The consequences of this terror campaign on the NWS workforce have been catastrophic. An internal assessment produced by NWS employees in April found that nearly half of the NWS Weather Forecast Offices (WFO) had vacancy rates of 20% or higher, a level that represents “critical understaffing” and impaired WFO services across the country.⁵ An April 10th agreement between NWS leadership and the NWS employee union detailed a large set of operational cuts and limitations at NWS that would subsequently be implemented based on “severe shortages” among the NWS workforce, resulting in “degraded operations” at impacted WFOs in every region of the country.⁶ Those degraded operations have been put into effect already: WFOs from California to Kentucky and Michigan to Wyoming have been forced to suspend overnight shifts or plan to do so imminently due to staffing shortages.⁷ NOAA is so desperate to staunch the bleeding at NWS that it has been forced to cannibalize other parts of the agency: an internal job solicitation put forward to NOAA staff in May sought applicants who were willing to transfer into NWS in order to fill more than 150 critical vacancies in occupational categories such as meteorologists, hydrologists, and technicians.⁸ The situation is dire enough that five former NWS Directors – the leaders of the NWS over a nearly 35-year period between 1988 and 2022 – released an open letter in early May, warning of the “impossible task” facing NWS staff and the potential for “needless loss of life” due to staffing shortages.⁹

Of course, the easiest way to address this problem – beyond halting the relentless political and ideological assault on the existing NWS workforce – would be to allow the agency to hire new employees to fill existing vacancies. But this is precisely what the Trump Administration has decided to block by imposing a hiring freeze on NWS. On January 20th, President Trump imposed a hiring freeze on all vacant civilian positions in the federal government.¹⁰ On April 17th, he extended the hiring freeze through July 15th.¹¹ In both instances, the hiring freeze

² <https://apnews.com/article/national-weather-service-layoffs-trump-doge-a65360a1eb2500b7d47c9c966e383f4a>.

³ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/03/20/noaa-offers-buyouts-early-retirement/82573145007/>;
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2025/04/16/national-weather-service-buyouts-staff-shortages-trump-administration/>.

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/08/climate/noaa-layoffs-trump.html>.

⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/doge-weather-cuts-tornado-dangerous-staff-warnings-aa7db3e0d0009d99c143742ab722c40a>.

⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/16/climate/national-weather-service-forecast-doge-trump.html>.

⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2025/05/16/weather-service-offices-overnight-cuts-map/>.

⁸ <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/05/14/democrats-raise-concerns-over-national-weather-service-staffing-00349714>.

⁹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/02/weather/nws-staffing-cuts-trump.html>.

¹⁰ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/hiring-freeze/>.

¹¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/extension-of-hiring-freeze/>.

contained an exemption for “positions related to immigration enforcement, national security, or public safety” and stated explicitly that the freeze “does not apply” to those positions.¹² Yet the National Weather Service – manifestly a public safety agency, charged with saving lives and property by informing the public about extreme weather events – is still shackled by the freeze and unable to hire from outside the agency. And the administration cannot say it was not warned: according to recent reporting, “NWS leadership has been trying unsuccessfully to get the agency designated as a public safety department and therefore exempted from the hiring freeze.”¹³

This is a crisis entirely of the Trump Administration’s own making. Until the hiring freeze is lifted for NWS, existing and forthcoming vacancies will remain unfilled and the crisis will continue to worsen. Panicked transfer offers to existing NOAA employees is a woefully insufficient response. And time is running out. The California wildfire season started this month, and according to recent reporting, two California NWS field locations no longer operate 24 hours a day.¹⁴ Hurricane season starts on June 1. It is vital that NWS be allowed to hire and address its staffing crisis immediately. The country needs qualified, dedicated experts in place at forecasting offices around the country before the next great outbreak of hurricanes, wildfires, or whatever extreme weather may threaten the nation. It is no exaggeration to say that lives depend on it.

In government as in weather, it is so much easier to destroy than to rebuild. You infamously called federal workers “villains” and declared that you would “put them in trauma.”¹⁵ But the public servants of the National Weather Service are heroes, not villains, and their trauma threatens the safety of us all. The NWS is a crown jewel of the federal government, a lifesaving public safety agency on the front lines of extreme weather events in every corner of the country every single day. Now President Trump and DOGE have pushed NWS to the brink of collapse. We implore you – for the sake of every American who will find themselves in harm’s way from hurricanes, wildfires, floods, tornadoes, and more – to grant a public safety exemption to the National Weather Service and lift its hiring freeze immediately. Do not wait for an avoidable tragedy. Do it now before it is too late.

Pursuant to Rule X of the House of Representatives, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology “shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development.”¹⁶ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over the National Weather Service.¹⁷ If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Josh Schneider or Sara Palasits with the Committee’s Minority staff at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

¹² <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/hiring-freeze/>;
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/extension-of-hiring-freeze/>.

¹³ <https://www.cnn.com/2025/05/14/weather/nws-critical-vacancies>.

¹⁴ <https://www.sfchronicle.com/weather/article/nws-weather-service-noaa-california-staffing-cuts-20329638.php>.

¹⁵ <https://www.propublica.org/article/video-donald-trump-russ-vought-center-renewing-america-maga>.

¹⁶ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

¹⁷ *Id.*

Sincerely,



Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology



Gabe Amo
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment

CC: Chairman Brian Babin
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Chairman Scott Franklin
Subcommittee on Environment

Secretary Howard Lutnick
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Acting Administrator Laura Grimm
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