

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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March 11, 2025

Craig Burkhardt
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Standards and Technology
National Institute of Standards and Technology
100 Bureau Drive
Gaithersburg, MD 20899

Dear Acting Under Secretary Burkhardt,

We write to you in advance of the March 13, 2025, deadline for Agency Reorganization Plans. As leaders on the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, we are extremely concerned that the so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) will seek to slash and burn core functions of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to sacrifice the agency at the altar of their twisted idea of “efficiency.” It is imperative that you stand up for NIST’s critical work and ensure that the Agency Reorganization Plan does not compromise the agency’s ability to carry out Congressionally authorized activities and advance our nation’s public safety, economic prosperity, and national security.

In Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Russell T. Vought’s February 26, 2025, memorandum, he writes that agencies’ plans should drive “the highest-quality, most efficient delivery of their statutorily-required functions.”¹ In the slapdash, broad, illegal firings of probationary employees across the federal government, agencies terminated many employees who had statutorily obligated responsibilities. Many of these firings across the government have

¹ Memorandum from Russell T. Vought and Charles Ezell to Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies, “Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans Requested by *Implementing The President’s ‘Department of Government Efficiency’ Workforce Optimization Initiative*,” February 26, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/latest-memos/guidance-on-agency-rif-and-reorganization-plans-requested-by-implementing-the-president-s-department-of-government-efficiency-workforce-optimization-initiative.pdf>.

been rescinded – some in response to judicial rulings² and administrative actions,³ and some because the firings were embarrassing and flagrantly in violation of agency missions to contribute to national security and public safety.^{4,5} In short, the probationary firings were a complete fiasco. It is clear that DOGE equates “efficiency” to the number of bodies it forces out the door – through illegal firings or coercion. It falls to you to stand up for the important mission of NIST.

You know very well how important the mission of NIST is. NIST is the world leader in measurement research that underpins critical and emerging technologies, including semiconductors, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and quantum information science. Every American interacts with NIST, whether they know it or not, whenever they check the time or location on their phone, which relies on the accuracy of NIST clocks. Small- and medium-sized businesses in all 50 states and Puerto Rico use NIST guidance and resources to remain competitive, secure, and state-of-the-art. It is absolutely critical that these and other functions are not eliminated or de facto eliminated due to reductions in force that make it impossible for NIST to continue its work.

NIST’s scientific mandate is an essential part of American competitiveness. We are locked in a race with China to ensure that the next wave of great technological breakthroughs happen here in the United States. Our national security and our economic prosperity depend on American scientists remaining at the forefront of global scientific innovation, so that the defining knowledge and technologies of the 21st Century are shaped by American values rather than the values of our rivals. If NIST loses its capacity to support the American scientific enterprise, it will be a generational setback for American interests. We cannot expect to maintain our leadership in international standards if we fire the scientists, close the offices, and attack the science underpinning that leadership. China will fill any vacuum left by NIST’s recission in international standards-setting. You must defend NIST’s ability to not just stay in the game, but to win it.

Congress appropriated NIST the money to pay staff and fulfill your legal obligations. Firing employees and diminishing your agency past the point where it can function does not deliver money back to the taxpayer; it violates the laws enacted by representatives elected by the American people, and it violates the Impoundment Control Act of 1974.⁶ President Trump and Elon Musk are lying to the American people when they claim that terminations, cuts, and cancellations will put more money in Americans’ pockets. As Acting Director of NIST, you are

² Andrea Hsu, “Judge says Trump’s mass firing of federal employees is illegal and should be stopped,” *NPR*, March 1, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/27/nx-s1-5311445/federal-employees-firing-court-judge>.

³ Andrea Hsu, “6 federal workers get their jobs back in 1st successful challenge to Trump’s firings,” *NPR*, February 26, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/25/nx-s1-5307906/trump-probationary-employees-firing-mspb>.

⁴ Brandon Drenon, “U.S. government tries to rehire nuclear staff it fired days ago,” *BBC*, February 18, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g3nrx1dq5o>.

⁵ Josh Funk, “Agriculture Department tries to rehire fired workers tied to bird flu response,” *AP*, February 19, 2025, accessed here: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4g3nrx1dq5o>.

⁶ 2 USC Ch. 17B: Impoundment Control, accessed here: <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title2/chapter17B&edition=prelim>.

obligated to spend the money appropriated to your agency as Congress intended. You must ensure your Agency Reorganization Plan does not break the law.

In order to conduct oversight of NIST's ability to uphold its mission and legal obligations, we request that you provide the Committee your Agency Reorganization Plan immediately upon transmitting it to OMB and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). We also request that you brief Committee staff, within one week of the plan's transmittal to OMB and OPM, on how NIST created the plan, any analysis performed to inform the plan, and the projected impact of the plan on NIST's workforce and activities.

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."⁷ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over the National Institute of Standards and Technology.⁸ If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Sara Palasits or Alan McQuinn with the Committee's Minority staff at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



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



Haley Stevens
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Research & Technology



Emilia Sykes
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight



April McClain Delaney
Member
Committee on Science, Space, and
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CC: Brian Babin
Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Chairman Jay Obernolte
Subcommittee on Research & Technology

Chairman Rich McCormick
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⁷ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

⁸ *Id.*