

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 30, 2025

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

The Honorable Laura Grimm
Acting NOAA Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick and Acting Administrator Grimm,

Due to terminations, hiring freezes, and vacancies, the National Weather Service (NWS) recently announced that it would cease 24-hour 7-day-a-week operations at the Sacramento and Hanford Weather Forecast Offices. These service reductions represent the beginning of a public safety crisis with potentially catastrophic consequences if the NWS is unable to retain the staff necessary to maintain around-the-clock weather monitoring in California. Across the state's airports, highways, farms, and reservoirs, accurate, reliable, and timely weather forecasting is critical for every Californian. We urge immediate action to halt any service interruptions at the Sacramento and Hanford Weather Forecast Offices by reinstating terminated workers and lifting the federal hiring freeze for NWS.

Across NWS, reports have recently stated that as many as 500 employees have been terminated or taken an early retirement, representing a 12% reduction in staffing since President Trump took office.¹ A recent internal assessment by NWS employees found that nearly half of NWS Weather Forecast Offices had vacancy rates of 20% or higher, a level that represents "critical understaffing."² The Sacramento office currently has seven vacancies for meteorologists, out of 16 positions, while the Hanford office has eight vacancies out of 13 positions³ — leaving both offices operating at half strength as we approach the peak of wildfire season. Slashing staffing in half at the offices responsible for predicting wildfires, atmospheric rivers, and natural disasters is unacceptable, puts thousands of lives at risk, and does nothing to increase government efficiency.

Recent years have demonstrated that wildfire season in California is now year-round. In 2024, California saw 8,018 wildfires, burning a total of 1,049,963 acres.⁴ Since 2013, an average of 1,029,049 acres have burned annually.⁵ NWS fire weather forecasting plays a critical role in predicting wildfire and protecting the lives of millions of Californians who live in fire prone areas. Incident meteorologists at NWS are often at the frontline to provide information to wildfire managers and first responders to safely contain wildfires.

¹ The Washington Post, "NOAA scrambles to fill forecasting jobs as hurricane season looms", May 14, 2025.

² AP News, "Nearly half of National Weather Service offices have 20% vacancy rates, and experts say it's a risk," April 4, 2025.

³ The Sacramento Bee, "Trump cuts leave California weather forecasters scrambling as fire season looms", May 21, 2025.

⁴ California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations, "By the numbers: 2024 California wildfire season", Feb. 18, 2025.

⁵ CalFire, "Statistics", May 19, 2025.

The Office of Water Prediction and the National Water Prediction Service also play a critical role in hydrological predictions, in concert with NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations. Water managers in California rely on the forecasting expertise of these federal agencies to make reservoir operating decisions. Without the NWS's expert hydrological forecasters, water managers in California are left blindly guessing and forced to make life-or-death decisions amid the state's swings between crippling drought and catastrophic flooding.

The National Weather Service is a public safety lifeline and an essential public good. This is not waste or fraud. Americans depend on accurate and timely weather forecasts and alerts not just to plan their day, but to prepare for, and survive, deadly natural disasters. If the NWS weather forecast offices in Sacramento and Hanford, together covering the entire Central Valley, cannot monitor overnight conditions, that puts our constituents in danger. This is a reckless and unnecessary risk that offers no benefit to the American public. We demand that you immediately reinstate all terminated workers at these offices, lift the federal hiring freeze for NWS, and ensure that the Sacramento and Hanford weather forecast offices are adequately staffed to maintain 24/7 operations. Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

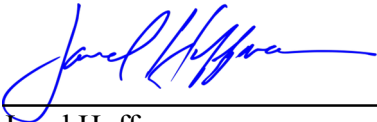
Sincerely,



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Doris Matsui
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress



Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress



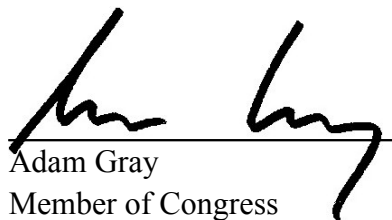
Josh Harder
Member of Congress



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Nancy Pelosi
Member of Congress



Adam Gray
Member of Congress



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



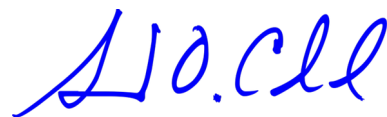
Kevin Mullin
Member of Congress



Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress



Jimmy Panetta
Member of Congress



Salud Carbajal
Member of Congress



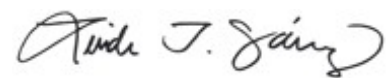
Raul Ruiz, M.D.
Member of Congress



Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



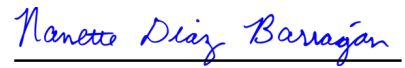
George Whitesides
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



Robert Garcia
Member of Congress



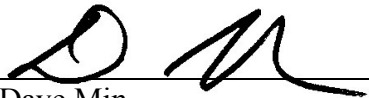
Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress



Derek T. Tran
Member of Congress



J. Luis Correa
Member of Congress



Dave Min
Member of Congress