

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 30, 2026

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

The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Ken Graham
Director
National Weather Service
1325 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Secretary Lutnick, Administrator Jacobs, and Director Graham:

We are alarmed by the reduction in weather balloon launches and its impact on the accuracy of weather forecasting across the United States. Timely and accurate weather forecasts are critical to protecting the lives, livelihoods, and property of the American people. Any degradation in forecast quality puts our constituents at risk.

Last year, the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) gut the National Weather Service (NWS) workforce by roughly 15 percent.¹ Now, the American people are feeling the pain of those shortsighted cuts as staffing shortages force multiple NWS weather offices to delay morning balloon launches or cancel twice-a-day launches altogether.² The upper air data collected during these balloon launches are “fundamental to forecasting models” that help identify extreme weather events.³ In addition to NWS forecasters, the upper air data is valuable to the commercial weather sector and researchers. As the nation enters peak hurricane, heat, wildfire, and severe thunder storm season, canceled or delayed balloon launches are creating data gaps in weather models that undermine confidence in forecast accuracy.⁴ NWS must resume its regular balloon launch schedule and plug these data gaps before lives are lost due to inaccurate forecasts or delayed severe weather warnings.

Despite NWS’s claims to the contrary, Americans have already been impacted by delayed balloon launches.⁵ There were no balloons launched upstream of eastern Kansas ahead of April 13.⁶ Later that day, severe storms and tornadoes raged through the Kansas City metro area, injuring three people and severely damaging homes and businesses.⁷ Tornado watches are typically issued hours before a tornado touches down. But, on April 13, NWS did not issue a tornado watch until 30 minutes before the first touchdown.⁸ Thankfully, no lives were lost in the storm. However, every minute a severe weather warning is delayed increases the chances that the storm

¹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/national-weather-service-hurricane-season-less-experienced-staff-missing-data/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/07/06/weather-warnings-budget-cuts-00986178>

⁵ <https://www.sciencefocus.com/planet-earth/us-unprepared-deadly-storm-season>

⁶ <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/07/06/weather-warnings-budget-cuts-00986178>

⁷ <https://fox4kc.com/news/photos-first-look-at-the-damage-after-tornadoes-hit-areas-south-of-kansas-city/>

⁸ https://www.bostonglobe.com/2026/04/28/metro/tornadoes-severe-weather-balloons-storms/?p1=BGSearch_Overlay_Results

causes loss of life or injury, economic losses, or damage to critical infrastructure. We cannot afford to continue rolling the dice with Americans' lives.

This is a manufactured crisis. President Trump and DOGE haphazardly slashed the NWS workforce by roughly 15 percent without considering the impact on public safety. Now, the American people are paying the price. Current efforts to fill staffing gaps at NWS are too little too late. Severe weather will not wait for NWS to hire and train hundreds of new staff. NWS must immediately restore balloon launch capacity before an inaccurate or delayed forecast puts our constituents in harms way.

We respectfully request answers to the following questions by August 13, 2026.

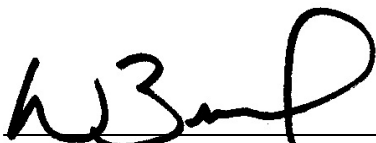
1. What steps is NWS taking to return to the twice-a-day balloon launch schedule at all weather offices?
2. What is the anticipated timeline for the restoration of the balloon launch schedule?
3. How many NWS vacancies have been filled and how many remain open? By what date does NWS expect to have filled all vacancies created by DOGE cuts (i.e., return to January 2025 staffing levels)?
4. Has NWS conducted a risk assessment on the impact of reduced balloon launch schedules? If so, please share the assessment.
5. During periods of high impact weather (e.g. impending hurricane landfall or severe weather outbreak) NWS offices often release supplemental balloons. What are the NWS plans for this critical operation going forward?

Continued failure to follow the twice-a-day balloon launch schedule undermines the accuracy of NWS weather forecasts and increases the likelihood that the American people will be left unprepared for severe weather events. Forcing our constituents to accept increased risks because of your shortsighted and partisan staffing cuts is unacceptable. You must protect Americans' lives, livelihoods, and property by immediately returning to the twice-a-day balloon launch schedule.

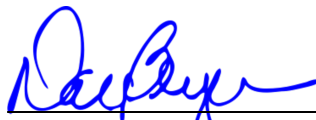
Sincerely,



Gabe Amo
Member of Congress



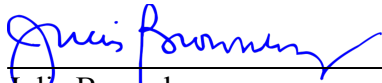
Wesley Bell
Member of Congress



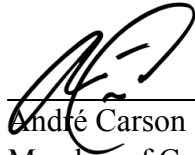
Donald S. Beyer Jr.
Member of Congress



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress



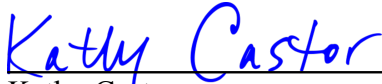
Julia Brownley
Member of Congress



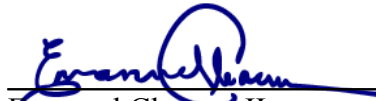
André Carson
Member of Congress



Ed Case
Member of Congress



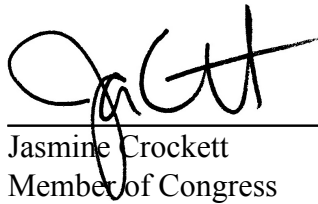
Kathy Castor
Member of Congress



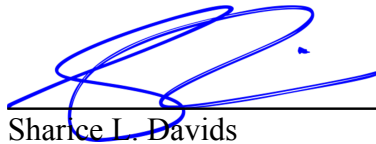
Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress



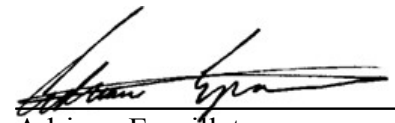
Jim Costa
Member of Congress



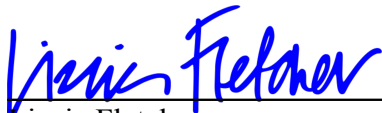
Jasmine Crockett
Member of Congress



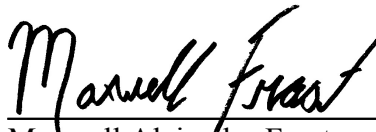
Sharice L. Davids
Member of Congress



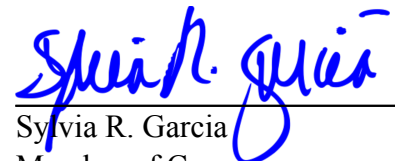
Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress



Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress



Maxwell Alejandro Frost
Member of Congress



Sylvia R. Garcia
Member of Congress



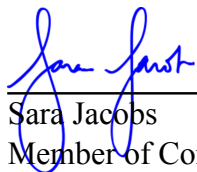
Adelita S. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Pablo José Hernández
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



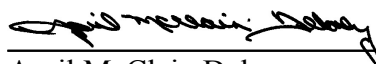
Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress



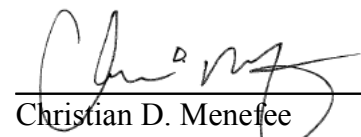
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress



Seth Magaziner
Member of Congress



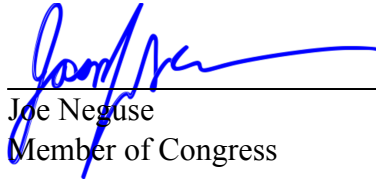
April McClain Delaney
Member of Congress



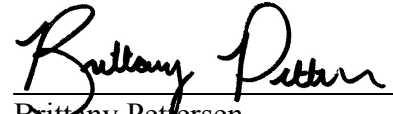
Christian D. Menefee
Member of Congress



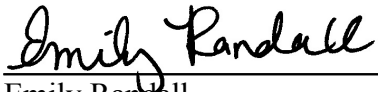
Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Joe Neguse
Member of Congress



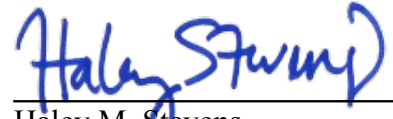
Brittany Petersen
Member of Congress



Emily Randall
Member of Congress



Deborah K. Ross
Member of Congress



Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress



Shri Thanedar
Member of Congress



Jim Tokuda
Member of Congress



Paul D. Tonko
Member of Congress