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Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Committee on Appropriations  
Washington, DC 20515-6015

July 10, 2025

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The Honorable Kristi Noem  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
1790 Ash Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20032

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

Dear Secretary Noem and Secretary Lutnick,

As the Ranking Members of the Appropriations Subcommittees on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, and Homeland Security, we write to express our deep concern regarding the recent and ongoing delays in grant disbursements, contracts, and cooperative agreements; the loss of employees to firings and early retirements; and the proposed fiscal year 2026 budget cuts, especially at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). These agencies are essential pillars of our nation's ability to forecast, prepare for, and respond to major natural disasters, capabilities that become even more vital as we enter what NOAA predicts will be an above-average Atlantic hurricane season.

NOAA plays a vital role in monitoring and forecasting severe weather and delivering real-time data and analysis that help to protect lives, property, and critical infrastructure. However, recent funding freezes and staff cuts, made without the consent of Congress, are threatening the agency's capacity to provide accurate and timely information to emergency managers, local officials, and the public. These services are not optional; they are a matter of life or death.

The consequences of these actions are already being felt. For example, the reduced National Weather Service staffing has led to reductions in the number of weather balloon launches throughout the country in recent months, compromising the quality of weather forecasts, as such launches are a critical tool for observing temperature, wind, relative humidity, and pressure above the ground.<sup>1</sup> During a recent outbreak of tornadic storms, the National Weather Service also came within hours of losing the Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System (AWIPS)—the primary means for

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<sup>1</sup> Freedman, A. (2025, June 20). Weather balloon launches plunge amid staffing cuts at National Weather Service. The Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/interactive/2025/weather-balloon-launches-staff-cuts/>

weather forecasters to quickly process, analyze, and disseminate weather data—due to lengthy Commerce Department delays in approving a contract extension.<sup>2</sup> Recent news reports have revealed a growing backlog of hundreds of unsigned NOAA contracts that is slowing key agency operations to a near standstill.<sup>3</sup> This is not just inefficient, it is dangerous.

Similarly, FEMA’s capacity to respond to and support communities in the aftermath of disasters depends on stable and sufficient funding. Recent budgetary reductions have significantly undermined the agency's ability to fulfill its mission. Notably, the Administration’s termination of the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program and cancellation of \$4 billion in funding from projects for communities nationwide that had been awarded.<sup>4</sup> This decision has disrupted long-term resilience projects and will significantly raise disaster response costs for local communities.

Studies by the National Institute of Building Sciences and the U.S. Chambers of Commerce find that hazard mitigation programs can generate benefits between \$6 - \$13 for every dollar invested.<sup>5</sup> According to NOAA, in 2024 there were 27 individual weather-related disasters with at least \$1 billion in damages following a record-setting 28 events in 2023.<sup>6</sup> This trend only puts more strain on an ever-growing Disaster Relief Fund (DRF). The BRIC program is a true return on investment for the taxpayer. Rather than constantly rebuilding communities that are continuously hit by natural disasters, BRIC allows communities to prepare and mitigate against that potential in the first place. We would also note that the Appropriations Committee recently voted on the fiscal year 2026 Homeland Security bill to reinstate and mandate the program moving forward.

At the same time, the DRF is nearing depletion and is projected to run a deficit of approximately \$9 billion in fiscal year 2025, and that does not account for any future, additional costs that may arise from the remaining three months in the fiscal year. Without further funding from Congress, FEMA may be forced to enact its Immediate Needs Funding (INF) policy, pausing non-emergency response-related activities and suspending other operations to maintain preparedness. These cuts, made without Congressional approval, further erode FEMA’s mission readiness just as disaster risk is increasing. The elimination of critical programs and the depletion of essential funds jeopardize recovery efforts and leave vulnerable communities without the support or resources they need when disaster strikes.

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<sup>2</sup> Snyder, J. (2025, April 1). NOAA hamstrung by contract backlog, hurting weather and climate forecasting. Axios. <https://www.axios.com/2025/04/01/noaa-commerce-department-contracts-weather-climate>

<sup>3</sup> Satterfield, J. (2025, March 27). Backlog of unsigned contracts paralyzes NOAA. E&E News. <https://www.eenews.net/articles/backlog-of-unsigned-contracts-paralyzes-noaa/>

<sup>4</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency. (2025, June 25). Disaster Relief Fund: Monthly report to Congress, June 2025. [https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema\\_ocfo\\_june-2025-disaster-relief-fund-report\\_06252025.pdf](https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/documents/fema_ocfo_june-2025-disaster-relief-fund-report_06252025.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> National Institute of Building Sciences. (n.d.). Natural Hazard Mitigation Saves: Federal Grants, Volume 3 [Archived version, May 16, 2025]. [https://web.archive.org/web/20250516122040/https://www.nibs.org/files/pdfs/ms\\_v3\\_federalgrants.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20250516122040/https://www.nibs.org/files/pdfs/ms_v3_federalgrants.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Lindsey, R. (2024, January 8). 2024 was an active year for U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters. NOAA Climate.gov. <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/blogs/beyond-data/2024-active-year-us-billion-dollar-weather-and-climate-disasters>

In light of these urgent concerns, we strongly urge and expect you to take immediate action to end these harmful funding freezes, reverse the termination of the BRIC program and awards cancellations, and to halt and reverse the staffing cuts, in order to restore full operational capability to both NOAA and FEMA. Finally, we further expect you to immediately implement a reliably efficient process for ensuring that grants, contracts, and cooperative agreements are not delayed. We ask that you provide us with a weekly update on all contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements that are currently pending your approval. The update should be broken out by component, amount, purpose, and length of time pending your approval. As stewards of public safety and emergency preparedness, it is your responsibility to ensure these agencies are fully equipped to meet the growing demands of a nation increasingly threatened by weather-driven disasters.


Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



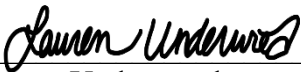
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Rosa L. DeLauro  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Appropriations



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Grace Meng  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,  
Science, and Related Agencies



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Lauren Underwood  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Homeland Security