

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 8, 2025

Laura Grimm

Chief of Staff performing the duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and
Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
1301 Constitution Avenue, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Grimm,

Your lack of response to my attached May 20 request for information about the reduced capabilities of the National Weather Service (NWS) is all the more troubling given the tragic Central Texas flooding. News reports and public staff information pages indicate that the NWS Austin/San Antonio office has a 22% vacancy rate with six vacant roles, including a hydrologist who performs flood projects, two meteorologists -- including the Warning and Coordination Meteorologist, and a science officer. The NWS San Angelo office, which has jurisdiction over neighboring Hill Country counties, was reportedly missing a senior hydrologist, staff forecaster, and meteorologist-in-charge, operating with a 17% vacancy rate.¹ All of these positions are critical for timely, accurate forecasts and warnings, including working with local emergency managers on when and how to warn and, as necessary, to evacuate impacted residents.

As of now, at least 100 people² have been killed by flooding in Central Texas, among them 27 campers and counselors at Camp Mystic.³ Although the NWS issued a flash flood warning at 1:14 AM, after most of Kerr County was asleep, a repeat of this warning at 3:35am as Camp Mystic was being inundated, and a flash flood emergency at 4:03 AM,⁴ this catastrophe raises questions regarding what and when communications were sent to local disaster

¹ Christopher Flavelle, "As Floods Hit, Key Roles Were Vacant at Weather Service Offices in Texas," *New York Times*, July 5, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/05/us/politics/texas-floods-warnings-vacancies.html>

² Berenice Garcia, Jessica Shuran Yu, and Carlos Nogueras Ramos, "Central Texas flooding death toll rises to at least 90 as search continues for survivors," *Texas Tribune*, July 5, 2025, <https://www.statesman.com/story/news/2025/07/06/camp-mystic-girls-identified-linnie-mccown-mary-stevens-texas-flood-victims/84485946007/>

³ Jayme Lozano Carver, "Camp Mystic says it's grieving the loss' of 27 campers and counselors," *Texas Tribune*, July 7, 2025, <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/07/07/texas-hill-country-flooding-camp-mystic/>

⁴ Karen Hua, John Kelly, Nikki Nolan, and Paula Cohen, "Timeline shows when emergency alerts warned of Texas flood disaster," *CBS News*, July 7, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/texas-flood-emergency-alerts-timeline/>

coordinators, what special flood statements were issued to the public, and what coordination occurred between NWS and local leaders.

Since the early retirement in April 2025 of the Warning and Coordination Meteorologist, who had over 32 years of experience, and more than half with NWS Austin/San Antonio, NWS has not filled this role, which is critical to informing local public emergency response officials and private stakeholders, including camp directors.⁵

With no response to my May 20 request nor to my followup inquiries on June 2 and June 13, I have modified my initial questions to more fully understand how such shortages affected Central Texas during recent floods:

1. Verify which positions at the NWS Austin/San Antonio office were unfilled on July 1, 2025.
2. Is it correct that each of these positions remained unfilled because of the Administration hiring freeze?
3. On July 3 and the morning of July 4, which staffers were on duty, and at what times did each arrive at the National Weather Service office?" Please provide the time cards for each, which show these times. For each, also include the title and the prior time served in their current role.
4. Regarding anyone who assumed the duties of the Warning and Coordination Meteorologist, what experience did that individual have working in which position and for how long at the NWS Austin/San Antonio office? And which other preexisting responsibilities was that individual expected to fulfill?
5. With one vacancy on an intended staff of three in the Hydrology and Observations department, which oversees rainfall, runoff, and flood projections, does NWS Austin/San Antonio maintain 24/7 coverage with a hydrologist during storms? During which specific times was a hydrologist in the office on July 3 and 4? Specifically, at what time did the hydrologist arrive on the morning of July 4?
6. For the other vacant positions, please also indicate who assumed these duties, what experience did that individual have working in which position and for how long at the NWS Austin/San Antonio office? And which other preexisting responsibilities was that individual expected to fulfill?
7. Following the June 2, 2025 announcement that NWS was taking immediate action to sustain mission-critical operations, did the NWS Austin/San Antonio office receive any short-term Temporary Duty Assignments (TDYs) to fill critical staff roles?
8. Did any NWS Austin/San Antonio staff depart prior to July 4, 2025 to serve as TDYs in other NWS offices?
9. Have any NWS Austin/San Antonio vacancies been included and advertised among the 126 permanent, mission-critical field positions under an exception to the NWS hiring freeze?

⁵ Nick Bannin, "Head of local weather warnings takes early retirement as NOAA cuts continue," *KXAN*, April 21, 2025, <https://www.kxan.com/weather/weather-blog/head-of-local-weather-warnings-takes-early-retirement-as-noaa-cuts-continue/>

10. Is the NWS Austin/San Antonio Warning and Coordination Meteorologist role included among the 126 permanent, mission-critical field positions under an exception to the NWS hiring freeze?
11. On July 2, 3, and 4, 2025, what calls were made, when, to which public and private community leaders to alert them of the coming storms? What guidance was provided to them? To whom, at what time, with what directions were any calls made to Camp Mystic or any of the other youth camps along the Guadalupe?
12. What public messaging products were published before July 3, 2025 to educate and inform Kerr County residents of the coming storms? If no special flood statements were issued, explain why not.
13. Provide the chat logs for NWS Austin/ San Antonio on July 2, 3 and 4, 2025.
14. Is it correct that there was less outreach on July 2-4 than that which was provided prior to the 2015 Wimberley Memorial Day flood?

Given considerable concern over the recent tragedy, I look forward to your prompt answers.

Sincerely,



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

CC:

Pat Vesper
Meteorologist-in-Charge
US Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Weather Service
Austin/San Antonio, TX
2090 Airport Road
New Braunfels, TX 78130

Roderick Anderson
Acting Inspector General
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Howard Lutnick

Secretary of Commerce
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Congress of the United States
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May 20, 2025

Laura Grimm

Chief of Staff performing the duties of Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and
Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)

1301 Constitution Avenue, Room 5128

Washington, DC 20230

Dear Ms. Grimm,

As the National Weather Service (NWS) faces severe understaffing in offices across the country, I write to inquire about current operations at NWS Austin/San Antonio and plans for continued operations in the event of further staff vacancies, extreme weather events, and proposed budget cuts to NOAA. Before the beginning of the Trump Administration, NWS Austin/San Antonio had an 11% vacancy rate. With recent departures of the Warning Coordination Meteorologist, Science and Operations Officer, and Observing Program Leader, the local office now has a 22% vacancy rate. This is critical understaffing.

Increasing instances of triple-digit temperatures, fire-related red flag warnings, and flash floods all require timely notice by NWS to protect Central Texas families. As the worsening climate crisis exacerbates temperatures and disasters, Austin faces extreme weather risks, especially in the increasingly long summers. A 22% vacancy rate at the local NWS jeopardizes the timeliness of forecasts and warnings on which the community relies.

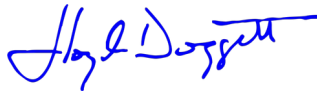
Understaffing is not unique to Austin. NWS Austin/San Antonio is one of the 52 out of 122 forecasting offices with a vacancy rate above 20%, while an additional eight offices have such a high vacancy rate that they cannot maintain 24/7/365 coverage. At least ten weather balloon release sites have limited or suspended launches due to personnel cuts. To manage such severe understaffing, NOAA is now offering to pay for moving expenses for staff to transfer to critical-need offices.

To understand how NOAA plans to maintain constant and complete coverage of weather forecasting and warnings, both across the country and in Austin/San Antonio, please provide answers to the following questions by June 2, 2025:

1. Confirm the current vacancy rate at NWS Austin/San Antonio as of May 20, 2025 and as of January 20, 2025.

2. What steps are being taken, if any, to ensure requested transfers do not worsen understaffing at other offices?
3. Should NOAA not fill the current 155 critical vacancies with transfers by its internal goal of May 27, 2025, what steps will the agency take to fill these roles?
4. Have any services at the NWS Austin/San Antonio office changed or degraded following staff departures since January 20, 2025?
5. What plan for continuity of operations is currently in effect at NWS Austin/San Antonio to manage services with critical understaffing?
6. In the event of an extreme weather event, is NWS Austin/San Antonio adequately staffed to provide full, constant forecasting and warning services?
7. What plan for continuity of operations is in place for if vacancies exceed the current rate? At what rate will NWS Austin/San Antonio be unable to maintain critical services?
8. If enacted, how will the Trump Administration's proposed \$209 million cut to procurement of weather satellites and infrastructure affect forecast operations at NWS Austin/San Antonio?

Sincerely,



Lloyd Doggett
Member of Congress

CC:
Pat Vesper
Meteorologist-in-Charge
US Department of Commerce
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Weather Service
Austin/San Antonio, TX
2090 Airport Road
New Braunfels, TX 78130