

United States Senate

March 6, 2025

The Honorable Doug Burgum
Secretary of the Interior
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Karl Stock
Regional Director
California-Great Basin Regional Office
Bureau of Reclamation
2800 Cottage Way
Sacramento CA 95825-1898

The Honorable David Palumbo
Acting Commissioner
Bureau of Reclamation
1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240-0001

The Honorable Genevieve Johnson
Acting Regional Director
Lower Colorado Basin Regional Office
Bureau of Reclamation
500 Fir Street
Boulder City, NV 89005-2403

Dear Secretary Burgum, Acting Commissioner Palumbo, Director Stock, and Director Johnson:

We write to express serious concerns regarding (i) alleged staff terminations at the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) in California and (ii) the recent Office of Personnel Management (OPM) memo calling for significant federal workforce reductions. On March 3, 2025, it was reported that Reclamation is set to lose about 100 employees in California, which is 10 percent of its regional staff. In the strongest terms, we ask that you provide further information and justification about these reductions and ensure that any additional cuts at the Department of the Interior (Interior) do not further impact Reclamation, an already lean agency that delivers water to more than 31 million Americans and 10 million acres of farmland that produce 60% of the nation's vegetables and 25% of its fruits and nuts.

Reclamation staff are indispensable to managing water in the West, where water systems are highly technical, complex, and closely coordinated with state, tribal, and local authorities. For example:

- **The Klamath Project** provides critical water supplies to farms, wildlife refuges, and tribal communities in Oregon and California. Reclamation staff are essential to balancing competing demands for Tribal cultural protection, agricultural water deliveries, and ecological health.
- **The Central Valley Project (CVP)** operates in tandem with the State Water Project (SWP) to supply water to farms, businesses, and residents. The two systems are deeply interconnected, making CVP staffing essential to SWP operations and water deliveries. As the CVP is a federal responsibility, Interior must ensure it remains fully staffed to protect California's water supply and agricultural economy.
- **The Lower Colorado Regional Office** operates Hoover Dam – one of the federal government's most critical infrastructure assets. Its staff provide real-time data and operational oversight essential for managing the Colorado River, ensuring reliable water deliveries to three western states, millions of people, and some of the nation's most productive farmland.

As a large coalition of California federal water contractors wrote to you in the attached letter, "In our experience, the vast majority of staff throughout Reclamation's California-Great Basin region is comprised of dedicated, talented federal employees, possessing specialized skills, knowledge, and the

relevant and specific experience necessary to safely and efficiently manage, operate and maintain one of the largest, most complex water projects in the world... This knowledge is absolutely *essential* to assuring the continued safe and reliable delivery of water throughout the state.” The staffing cuts previously made by and deferred resignations conducted through this Administration have already led to the loss of many experienced employees. As the water contractors point out, additional losses will threaten public health and safety and negatively impact the water delivery system for the nation’s largest state economy.

Any federal dollars “saved” from a reduction in staffing will ultimately cost taxpayers more through disrupted supply chains, increased burdens on state taxpayers, and emergency response due to the instability created by these reductions. Aging dams, reservoirs, and conveyance systems require continuous monitoring and maintenance, and without adequate staffing, the risk of infrastructure failures increases. Such failures could have catastrophic consequences, including flooding, water contamination, and severe disruptions to California’s agricultural and urban economies.

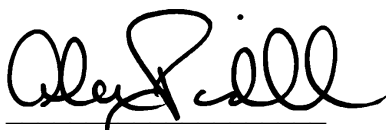
In light of these challenges, please answer the following questions by March 13, 2025.

1. What analyses, if any, have been completed to determine the budgetary and broader economic impacts of losing Reclamation employees that have already been or will be lost?
2. How does Interior plan to make up for the current and anticipated loss of specialized knowledge about California’s water systems, including the CVP, given these terminations?
3. How will Interior and Reclamation continue to manage, operate, and maintain California’s aging infrastructure in light of these staffing losses?
4. According to OPM’s FedScope, there were 5,739 employees at Reclamation as of September 2024. How many Reclamation employees are there as of March 6, 2025?
5. What are the job functions and employment locations of Reclamation employees in California who have been terminated and accepted deferred resignation?
6. Please describe in detail, the degree to which Mr. Elon Musk and/or representatives from the “Department of Government Efficiency” or “United States DOGE Service” have been involved in any part of these firings within Interior and Reclamation.

We strongly urge you to reconsider the termination of these critical Reclamation employees and halt further workforce reductions at Reclamation. Rather than decimating the agency and its dedicated staff, Interior should work with Congress to bolster Reclamation’s workforce to meet the growing demands of extreme weather, population growth, and increasing pressures on our water supply systems.

We welcome the opportunity to further discuss these concerns and would be happy to host you for a visit at any time to give you a tour of California’s vital water infrastructure and introduce you to the outstanding Reclamation staff in California.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator