



July 17, 2025

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Schumer:

I am responding to your letter of July 7, 2025, regarding the flash flooding in Kerr County, Texas, and the surrounding region. I share your and the nation's deep sorrow over this disaster and sincere empathy for those who lost loved ones as a result.

Your letter asked that the Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General (OIG) assess staffing levels at the National Weather Service (NWS), a component under the Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and determine whether any shortfalls have adversely affected NWS forecasts, warnings, and other aspects of its operations—both with respect to the recent flooding in Texas and nationwide.

Since fiscal year 2023, our Top Management Challenges (TMC) reports have consistently highlighted persistent workforce issues within NWS.¹ In our fiscal year 2024 TMC report, for example, we noted that vacancy rates for NWS physical science and meteorology staff had not improved, despite increased funding intended to meet staffing requirements. Additionally, the agency's hiring timelines were nearly double the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's 80-day standard, contributing to heavier workloads, burnout, and increased turnover.

To address the concerns raised in our past TMC reports, prior to the recent flash flooding in and around Kerr County, Texas, my office began planning an audit to determine whether staffing levels, hiring limitations, and operational practices at NWS field offices have impacted the agency's ability to effectively respond to high-impact weather events through timely forecasts, warnings, and impact-based decision support services. We are now initiating this work.

In addition, we have separately convened a dedicated review team to examine the circumstances surrounding the recent Texas floods. This special review will gather relevant facts regarding NWS actions and response specifically relevant to the catastrophic flash flood event in Texas. The report from this review will provide factual details and serve to

¹ These reports are available on OIG's public website, <https://www.oig.doc.gov/>.



inform the previously mentioned audit of greater NWS operational needs, which could result in findings and recommendations.

We are committed to undertaking thorough, fact-based work to meet our oversight objectives. We will advise you and other stakeholders of the progress of these projects, provide NWS and the Department with an opportunity to comment on the draft reports, and publicly issue final reports consistent with our established processes and applicable audit and evaluation standards.

I look forward to sharing the results of our work with the Department, NOAA, NWS, and congressional stakeholders as part of our mission to conduct independent and objective oversight to improve the programs and operations of the Department. Should you or your staff wish to discuss any of the information above, please contact me or OIG's Senior Legislative Affairs Officer, Andrew Schmidt, at (202) 794-7788.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Duane E. Townsend", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Duane E. Townsend
Acting Inspector General