UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYSTEM

Office of the President
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Timothy L. Killeen
President

January 13, 2026

Dear Members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation,

As president of the University of Illinois System and the former director of the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), I am writing to respectfully urge your continued support and protection of NCAR as a vital element of the nation's scientific, economic, and public-safety infrastructure. Recently, Office of Management and Budget Director Russell Vought announced the intention to dismantle the center. My years of leadership and service at NCAR, at the National Science Foundation, and now within Illinois provide me a unique perspective on the indispensable role this national center plays in advancing research, preparedness, education and innovation across the country, and particularly here in Illinois.

The vital role NCAR plays

As our country faces growing challenges related to extreme weather, air quality, and environmental risk, NCAR remains one of the few institutions uniquely equipped to provide the research, tools, and leadership needed to prepare communities and decision-makers for the future. NCAR serves as a national hub for science that supports researchers, educators, and public institutions across the United States. Its work underpins the weather and Earth-systems models that guide emergency management, public safety planning, infrastructure investment, agriculture productivity, transportation, and energy reliability. The center also plays a vital role in developing and supporting widely used modeling systems, such as those used by federal agencies, universities, and international partners to better anticipate major storms, floods, droughts, wildfires, and other hazards that directly affect lives and livelihoods.

While some have characterized NCAR as a "climate center" or "climate agency," climate research comprises only a part of the NCAR portfolio. Its research is much broader, including hydrology, solar physics, space weather, and wildfires. NCAR has played a pivotal role in aviation safety, including turbulence and icing, as well as in national security, including the understanding of the release of chemical and biological agents near high-value government buildings.

Equally important, and often overlooked, NCAR is a national asset that strengthens America's scientific workforce. It provides world-class training, open research opportunities, and access to specialized facilities that individual universities or agencies would find difficult or impossible to sustain on their own. This investment in people, especially students and early-career scientists, ensures that the United

States remains at the forefront of discovery and innovation in an era when environmental intelligence is inseparable from economic strength and national security.

Moreover, NCAR has long demonstrated a strong commitment to public benefit. Its research findings, data, and tools are broadly shared, enabling communities of every size, from local municipalities to national agencies, to make better-informed, evidence-based decisions. In many ways, NCAR exemplifies the best of the nation's scientific mission: it is collaborative, rigorous, forward-looking, and firmly oriented toward service.

As a Federally Funded Research and Development Center (FFRDC), NCAR is managed by a consortium of over 100 public and private universities. Indeed, NCAR was created to undertake major projects that lie well beyond the capabilities of individual universities or the private sector, and it always does so in close partnership with them. Consequently, universities reap tremendous benefits from NCAR. The consortium management organization of NCAR, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), has developed numerous educational resources used across higher education, not only in the atmospheric and climate sciences but also in physics and chemistry.

A strong Illinois–NCAR partnership

Closer to home, not only is NCAR a national asset, Illinois' universities and national labs have long been among NCAR's closest collaborators. A few examples include:

- **Supercomputing collaboration with NCSA (University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign):** NCAR and NCSA partner to advance national supercomputing capacity, especially for extreme-weather prediction and atmospheric science. Through NSF's ACCESS/RAMPS initiative, funded in 2022, they are transforming how high-performance computing resources are allocated nationwide, expanding access for researchers and strengthening both NCAR's mission and Illinois' leadership in advanced computing.
- **Research collaboration through the Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) Model and the Community Earth System Model (CESM):** Researchers and students throughout Illinois contribute to the development and application of WRF and CESM, which are two of the world's leading atmospheric research and forecasting systems developed by NCAR, helping to improve severe-weather prediction in the Midwest and deepen understanding of weather and climate across the United States.
- **Joint climate and hydrology research on Midwest flood and precipitation extremes:** Faculty and other researchers from the University of Illinois System and other Illinois institutions have partnered with NCAR scientists to better understand changing rainfall patterns, flood risk, and hydrologic extremes affecting Illinois communities, agriculture, and infrastructure.
- **Student training and workforce development:** Illinois students participate in NCAR's undergraduate and graduate internships, visitor programs, postdoctoral programs and collaborative research, building the STEM workforce that powers our weather services, energy sector, and environmental research.

These partnerships illustrate that NCAR is more than a federal laboratory. It serves as a national network hub developed over decades of support from the federal government and scientific community that amplifies the capacity of research universities like ours, returning value many times over to the Illinois taxpayers who support it.

Preserving a National Asset

Strong federal support for NCAR is essential to:

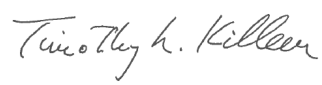
- maintaining U.S. leadership in weather and Earth science;
- ensuring continuity of long-term observational and modeling systems that benefit all Americans;
- safeguarding communities from severe-weather risks;
- supporting agriculture, transportation, energy, and health sectors;
- educating and training the next generation of scientists and engineers.

Dismantling NCAR, even partially, or disruption of federal support for its work would reverberate across the U.S. research ecosystem, weakening capabilities that take decades to build and that cannot be quickly or cheaply replicated.

In closing, I respectfully urge you to support sustained federal investment in NCAR and oppose actions that would undermine its mission, workforce, or continuity.

Thank you for your longstanding support for research and education in Illinois.

Sincerely,



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