

[Union of
Concerned Scientists



Catalyst

Volume 26, Summer 2026

FEMA and Danger Season

*UCS is fighting attacks
on disaster relief funding*

Fired Federal Scientists Speak Up

How to Push Back on Data Centers

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A Scientist's Moral Imperative



By Dr. Gretchen Goldman



When I was in college, I spent a summer as an intern with the US Environmental Protection Agency, where I was supervised by smart, thoughtful scientists who relied on their expertise to serve the public good. In my mentors, I saw their pride in being part of a robust US scientific enterprise, and in the tangible effects of their work as they improved environmental conditions for real people. They inspired me to follow a similar path.

During my return to federal service many years later, I worked alongside leaders who could have chosen more lucrative roles at Silicon Valley tech firms, or in pharmaceutical companies. But they chose to devote their expertise to public service: to research innovative therapies for debilitating diseases, to support community preparedness for climate change, to keep our food and medications safe, and to ensure cutting-edge transportation technologies improve life for the public.

I worked with many federal scientists who felt drawn to public service because of their moral imperative to help people. So I can't help but view the indiscriminate firings of so many thousands of federal scientists (p. 12) as *deeply immoral*.

Unfortunately, there's no shortage of such actions under the second Trump administration. Proposing \$1.5 trillion to fund a Department of Defense that has taken no accountability for its failures, while regular people can't afford groceries (p. 22)? Immoral. Leaving Black and Brown communities who've contributed the least to the climate crisis on their own to survive through heat waves and life-threatening storms (p. 8)? Immoral.

My colleagues and I at the Union of Concerned Scientists have been working with all hands on deck to do our own moral duty: to speak the truth about the harm we see and the people affected, and to fight back with every tool at our disposal. With your support, we resist normalizing or giving in to this administration's corruption and malignance.

We're working toward a future when those who are dedicated to carrying out their lives and work with integrity (including scientific integrity) can once again take the lead in building a better world for us all. This is my own moral imperative: to believe that we will get there. Thank you for being on our side. {C}

Gretchen Goldman, PhD, is president and CEO of UCS. Read more from Gretchen on our blog, *The Equation*, at blog.ucs.org.

UCS ON THE RECORD . . . AND HAVING AN IMPACT

“The industry knows it’s vulnerable. They are not totally confident they can win cases on their merits.”

DR. L. DELTA MERNER, *lead scientist for the UCS climate accountability campaign, quoted in the Guardian about legislation introduced by members of Congress that would shield Big Oil companies from liability in climate lawsuits*

“This use of ‘gold standard science’ is deceptive. . . . It undercuts all of the values and standards and principles that were already being prioritized and implemented in federal agencies.”

DR. JULES BARBATI-DAJCHES, *analyst with the Center for Science and Democracy at UCS, in a Los Angeles Times article about how the Trump administration’s “Gold Standard Science” executive order has led to more politicization of science, not less*

“Tech companies are allowing . . . an enormous increase in fossil fuel dependence under their watch and because of their actions. It is only because of these data centers that these gas plants are being built.”

JULIE McNAMARA, *UCS federal energy policy director, in an AP News story on Big Tech companies backsliding on their clean energy commitments and contributing to a rise in polluting emissions*

“[The] Environmental Protection Agency and Health and Human Services can help identify where nitrate pollution is coming from, and also help communities bring those levels down.”

DR. STACY WOODS, *research director in the UCS Food and Environment Program, in an interview with Wisconsin Public Radio on unsafe levels of nitrates from fertilizer in drinking water. UCS and other organizations called on the EPA and HHS to protect midwesterners’ drinking water.*

“I look forward to the day where we don’t have to keep playing ping-pong between administrations with these rules; where one administration strengthens it, the next one rolls it back.”

DARYA MINOVI, *UCS manager of fair access research, in a Prism Reports article on the Trump administration’s proposal to weaken rules curbing emissions of the carcinogenic gas ethylene oxide*

“[The National Science Foundation] is now fully at the behest of the White House.”

DR. CARLOS MARTINEZ, *UCS senior climate scientist, in an Inside Climate News story on the Trump administration firing all 22 members of the board responsible for overseeing the National Science Foundation*



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UCS shares ousted federal scientists’ stories

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UCS Fights Proposed Forest Service Cuts



The 2022 Oak Fire burns near Jerseydale, California. The US Forest Service is among the world's leading wildland fire research organizations; cuts to its capacity in a time of increasing wildfires puts people and land at unconscionable risk.

When Dr. Julian Reyes, former federal scientist and current Union of Concerned Scientists chief of staff, heard about a proposed plan from the Trump administration to reorganize the US Forest Service by moving its headquarters from the nation's capital to Utah and closing 57 of its 77 research and development facilities, he knew he had to speak up.

"This plan will leave us to face growing climate threats with fewer experts predicting and managing wildfires. It also leaves us less equipped to protect forests that provide clean air and water, and less able to support many rural livelihoods," says Reyes, who used to work directly with Forest Service scientists in research and development at its parent agency, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The Forest Service's mission in administering more than 193 million acres of land—including 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands—is to "sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." Through its research and development programs, the agency also conducts independent science that provides the foundation for many forest management decisions—including crucial data about wildfires. Indeed, the research and development program at the Forest Service bills itself as the world's leading wildland fire research organization.

MISPLACED PRIORITIES

"The agency has done all this on a budget that equates to roughly 0.6 percent of

the president's proposed \$1.5 trillion budget for national defense spending [see p. 22]," says Reyes. "And now, this new plan would dismantle the world's premier, and largest, wildfire research agency at a time when wildfire risk, climate impacts, and economic losses are accelerating. Cutting research into wildfires—especially in a 'super' El Niño year with significant drought risk—isn't smart."

Reyes was invited on NPR's 1A along with the head of the Forest Service, whom Reyes challenged on these plans while millions listened live. Subsequently, the agency edited its website to soften some of the language in its proposed plans. To read more about the Forest Service and how UCS is fighting to protect it, visit act.ucs.org/sum26-forests.

The Senate Has an Opportunity to Improve Federal Scientific Integrity



After a gap of seven years, the Scientific Integrity Act was reintroduced in the US Senate on May 14 by Senator Brian Schatz and 20 cosponsors. This much-needed bill would require federal agencies to create and enforce scientific integrity policies that help defend government science—including lifesaving medical research, severe weather monitoring, and the analysis that informs public health rules—from political interference. Scientific integrity doesn't just protect federal scientists; it protects us all.

The unprecedented pace of attacks on science by the Trump administration highlights the importance of this legislation. These attacks include instances when political officials delayed the release of scientific reports, ordered federal scientists to withdraw peer-reviewed studies from scientific journals, or redid analyses that produced results at odds with the administration's policy preferences.

UCS staff have been working for more than 10 years on this effort, rallying support across the country from scientists and advocates, contributing language that was used verbatim in the bill, and teaming up with supporters to recruit the bill's cosponsors.

ACTION CENTER: HELP US MAKE PROGRESS ON THESE KEY ISSUES

UCS has ample opportunities for you to make your voice heard this summer. Sign onto our letters to Congress, and download our toolkit linked below to help prepare you for in-person meetings with your elected officials during their August recess (August 10–September 11, 2026).

SAVE THE FOREST SERVICE

The US Forest Service's plan to close most of its nationwide research facilities (see far left) and move its headquarters from Washington, DC, to Salt Lake City, Utah, would eliminate facilities conducting beneficial research on early warning signals of adverse climate events, endangering public safety. Urge Congress to reverse this restructuring and protect critical US Forest Service capabilities that can save lives: act.ucs.org/sum26-usfs-action

FUND FEMA TO SAVE LIVES

FEMA plays a critical role in saving lives, supporting recovery, and preparing communities for climate-driven disasters. The Trump administration has recklessly fired agency staff, frozen recovery grants, targeted resilience programs, and shifted the burden of disaster recovery onto states (p. 8). Tell Congress to protect FEMA's ability to serve the public as Danger Season approaches: act.ucs.org/sum26-fema-action

DEMAND PROTECTIONS FOR SCIENTISTS

Federal scientists need strong protections to ensure their work is not distorted, suppressed, or subject to retaliation because of political interference. The Scientific Integrity Act (see left) would help safeguard federal scientists and ensure government decisions are guided by the best available evidence. Demand that your members of Congress institute scientific integrity protections for federal scientists: act.ucs.org/sum26-si-action

PROTECT YOUR COMMUNITY FROM THE IMPACTS OF DATA CENTERS

The pace and scope of data center development is driving a rise in electricity demand unlike anything we've seen in recent years. Use our form to ask your state officials to protect your community from data centers' impacts on electricity costs and the power grid: act.ucs.org/sum26-energy-action

DEMAND CHANGE FROM YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

More information about policy talking points, plus polling data, messaging research, and training on multiple ways to get involved is available in our new August Recess Toolkit. To get started, scan the code or visit: act.ucs.org/sum26-toolkit



UCS Film Celebrating Determined Community Debuts at Festival

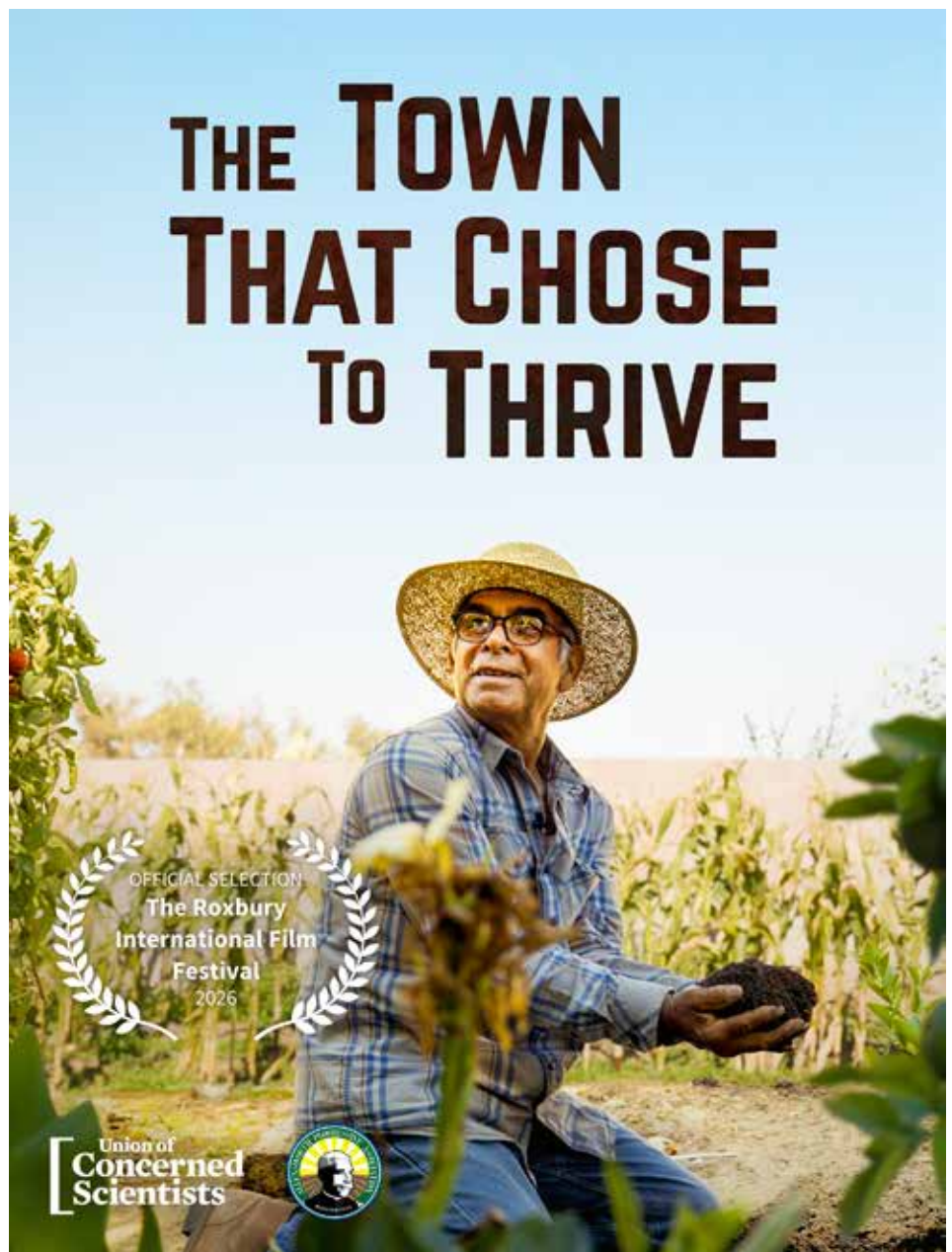
As in many low-income towns situated near giant agricultural operations, the residents of Allensworth, California, have the odds stacked against them through no fault of their own: unhealthy soil, air, and drinking water; a lack of investment in infrastructure stretching back decades that would protect people from the changing climate; and political underrepresentation. A legacy of racist oppression has also led to socioeconomic inequities and neglect among Allensworth's Black, Indigenous, and Latino residents.

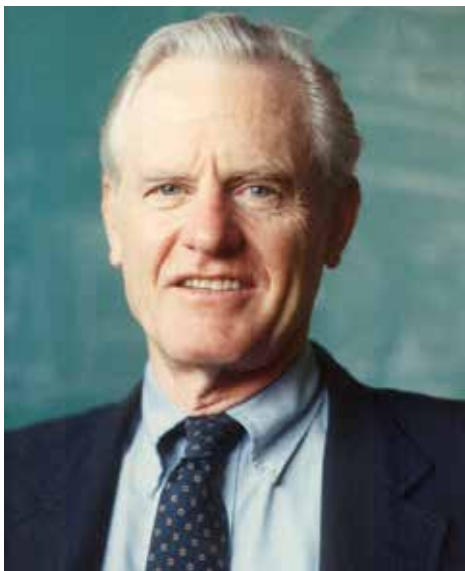
In a documentary short film produced by UCS and the Allensworth Progressive Association, the town's residents lay out their vision for a future in which Allensworth is replenished, resilient, and self-determined. This summer, *The Town That Chose to Thrive* was accepted to, and screened by, the highly competitive Roxbury International Film Festival, New England's largest film festival dedicated to celebrating films by, for, and about people of color.

"It was an amazing experience to spend time with the Allensworth community. We felt so welcomed by everyone we met, and it's a honor to tell their story," says UCS multimedia producer Nick Davis-Iannaco, part of the team behind the short film.

For communities facing similar challenges, Allensworth's residents, who prioritize their town's well-being and prosperity through sustainable farming and energy independence, can serve as a model.

Watch the film now at act.ucs.org/sum26-Allensworth.





Remembering UCS Cofounder, Nobel Laureate Henry Kendall

This December 6, 2026, will be the centennial birthday of the late Dr. Henry Kendall, Nobel Prize laureate and UCS cofounder, who was deeply committed to arms control and nuclear weapons issues throughout his lifetime. Kendall coauthored the landmark 1984 UCS study *The Fallacy of Star Wars*—a critique of the US government’s proposed space-based missile defense system at the time—that played an important role in the debate surrounding the Reagan administration’s defense priorities.

If you knew Henry Kendall personally, as a student, colleague, or friend, and would like to share your story, UCS would greatly appreciate your testimonial about what he meant to you. Share a few sentences about your connection at act.ucs.org/sum26-kendall.

Photo: UCS

Cultivating a Congressional Champion for Science

Science needs champions in Congress who will fight against budget cuts, firings, and reorganizations within federal scientific agencies, and insist on science-based policies that will protect people and the environment. To cultivate such champions and forge connections between local scientists and their representatives in Congress, UCS has been tapping experts from our Science Network: more than 23,000 scientists, engineers, and other experts who work with UCS by applying their knowledge and technical skills to the most important issues we face.

This year, about 20 Science Network experts in Massachusetts represented by Congresswoman Katherine Clark, an influential leader of the House Democratic Caucus, reached out to ask her help

in elevating science as a priority in the national agenda and in advancing efforts to protect federal scientific integrity and fund government research. These volunteers have written letters to the editor, spoken publicly about their experiences, and participated in a direct meeting with the congresswoman and her team.

Most recently, Representative Clark’s office asked these Science Network experts to submit a proposal for a science-focused town hall, creating a space for her constituents to share their perspectives and for science to be part of the public conversation. This work is helping build stronger, ongoing connections between decisionmakers and the people closest to the issues—and demonstrating how local voices can help shape national leadership priorities and actions.

SCIENCE IS RISING— JOIN THE ACTION CORPS

Our Science Rising initiative is now live! We are speaking out, mobilizing, and providing resources and opportunities for scientists—and science supporters—to take action to protect science and our democracy. Join our Science Rising Action Corps and get involved today:

act.ucs.org/sum26-science-rising



A large excavator with a long boom is positioned on a massive pile of rubble and debris. The debris consists of broken concrete, twisted metal, and other structural remnants of buildings. In the background, some trees and a clear blue sky are visible. The scene suggests a major disaster, such as an earthquake or explosion, and the excavator is likely involved in cleanup or reconstruction efforts.

FEMA IS IN TROUBLE. SO ARE WE.

Most Americans agree the federal government should play a major role in responding to disasters. So why is President Trump picking FEMA apart?

BY MICHELLE RAMA-POCCIA





Activists, including those affected by flash floods in Texas in July 2025, hold signs calling for the restoration of federal funding for emergency management and climate and weather research. Of the 135 people killed by the floods, 27 were children at summer camp, represented by the kind of trunks they might have brought with them.

In their worst moments, when storms or wildfires hit their communities and upend their lives, the sight of responders in blue vests emblazoned with four letters—FEMA—is reassuring to people in crisis. Those four letters say, “Help is here.”

Yet, for the Federal Emergency Management Administration under President Trump, help has been slow and hard to find. The agency has been maligned, threatened, underfunded, and bullied by its own overseers. Deeply concerning for people across the country, Trump has even called into question whether federal emergency response will continue to exist.

During his second administration, President Trump has already appointed *multiple* unqualified FEMA leaders and overseen chaotic operations that have led to the cancelation of billions in aid for communities to prepare for climate extremes and disasters. This followed the administration’s plan to gut FEMA, as laid out in the Heritage Foundation’s Project 2025—a blueprint for dismantling the federal government and increasing executive power that the Trump administration has followed closely. Only after the tragic July 2025 Texas floods did the president back away from his initial push to eliminate FEMA altogether.

Before those floods, Trump had convened a FEMA Review Council to assess and make recommendations on the agency’s fate. After delays and the firing of Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem—who cochaired the council—the council finally released its recommendations this May. While it backed off from explicitly calling for steep cuts in agency staffing, the council aligned itself with the destructive Project 2025 playbook and recommended stricter criteria for granting disaster assistance and revamping the National Flood Insurance Program (possibly privatizing this essential program for nearly 5 million people in the United States and ignoring badly needed affordability provisions).

The council’s recommendations would shift the burden of disaster response and recovery to state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments and downsize FEMA’s federal role. President Trump has already begun to move in that direction, denying more than a quarter of all state requests for disaster declarations during his second term—a rate higher than any other president in FEMA’s history.

“To suggest states can simply take on disaster response and recovery for all but the most catastrophic disasters effectively would require 56 states and territories to each replicate federal efforts at the local scale,” says Shana Udvardy, senior climate resilience policy analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists. “States have responded clearly by saying they don’t have the resources, staff, or capacity to implement state-level individual assistance or door-to-door canvassing after major disasters.”

Pushing disaster response and recovery onto the states also ignores the impetus for FEMA’s establishment. The agency was created in 1979 because many states lack the logistical capabilities to coordinate what can be enormous, long-lasting operations between many federal agencies, as well as the equipment and financial resources to respond to major disasters that often cross state boundaries.

President Trump has denied more than a quarter of all state requests for disaster declarations.

MENAGERIE OF INCOMPETENCE

Besides periodically threatening to do away with FEMA, President Trump has presided over several chaotic leadership changes at the agency—including naming three unqualified acting FEMA administrators.

First came David Richardson, who didn't know there was such a thing as a hurricane season and was fired after FEMA staff wrote a letter saying his ineptitude would match the government's failures after Hurricane Katrina should another such disaster occur. The second was Cameron Hamilton, who was fired for *defending* FEMA—but not before canceling \$11 billion in pandemic-related disaster payments and trying to cancel billions more in funding that would protect communities from disasters before they strike.

The third, Karen Evans, lacked emergency and disaster response experience just like her predecessors, and also ushered in devastating cost-cutting measures. After having to reinstate \$1 billion allocated by Congress to a grant program known as Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities after 23 states sued the administration, she was fired in May by President Trump, who, in an illogical turn of events, renominated the previously fired Cameron Hamilton.

It should come as no surprise that there is much uncertainty for agency staff, disaster survivors, and the public at large about what this all means for communities like Asheville, North Carolina (still recovering from Hurricane Helene), or Altadena, California (rebuilding after last year's wildfires). And what will it mean for federal disaster response and recovery when the next extreme weather— or climate-driven disaster hits? “If there are multiple disasters simultaneously, then I am concerned about the agency's capacity to respond to emergencies,” says Udvardy.

What does appear to be certain is the increasing politicization of FEMA assistance. The president has granted disaster relief funds unevenly, according to Urban Institute research (see p. 20). During his second term, disaster declaration requests from states where he won the 2024 election had an approval rate of almost 84 percent, while the approval rate for states he lost was 40 percent.

TRIPLE THREAT

It's against this chaotic backdrop that people across the country are grappling with what UCS calls Triple Danger Season: when the trifecta of climate change, a reckless authoritarian government, and growing economic insecurity (caused in large part by that government's policies) collide.

Across the United States, record extremes were felt early this year as the Upper Midwest had its wettest April on record and almost half the nation experienced a severe or exceptional drought, with the Southeast breaking its own record. The country also recorded early heat waves and extreme wildfires in states like Florida and Georgia, which haven't historically experienced them, as well as low snowpack in the West. All these extremes are expected to worsen with more intense heat ahead.

(continued on p. 20)

HOW TO REPAIR THE DAMAGE

UCS is urging leaders at FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security to restore FEMA's staffing levels and critical programs like preparedness grants and post-disaster door-to-door canvassing. The agency must also move quickly to relieve the bottleneck in grants and contracts caused by former DHS Secretary Noem, who required review of any funding requests exceeding \$100,000. Funding allocations must be sped up significantly to help communities recover from disasters and shore up their resilience efforts.

To ensure FEMA can support communities in need during disaster response and recovery, Congress must:

- reverse its reckless policy of shifting disaster response and recovery to state, local, territorial, and Tribal governments;
- strengthen FEMA and its internal systems by returning the agency to cabinet-level status and pressuring the president to nominate a qualified administrator;
- modernize FEMA's preparedness and resilience grant programs and boost funding for pre-disaster mitigation grant programs;
- update and reform the National Flood Insurance Program and reject calls to privatize it; and,
- restore requirements to incorporate climate change and equity in all FEMA standards, programs, and guidance.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

UCS is fighting on behalf of FEMA so communities can be better prepared and more resilient, even as the impacts of climate change worsen. And you can support the agency, too. Sign our petition telling Congress to protect FEMA's ability to serve us at act.ucs.org/sum26-fema-action.

And this August, while Congress is in recess, attend district meetings and speak with your representatives in person. Tell them you're concerned about how FEMA will respond if disaster strikes your community, that the Trump administration has cut too much staff from the agency, and that they need to fund preparedness measures, especially as the risks and costs of climate-fueled disasters grow. (Learn more on p. 5.)

FORCED OUT

The Trump administration's attacks on federal science have disrupted vital research—and people's lives. Meet four scientists directly affected.

BY SETH MICHAELS AND PAMELA WORTH

Thousands of government scientists have been pushed out of their public service careers by the Trump administration. Some were fired, while others left because their work was targeted for political interference. It's a massive loss not just for these scientists but for everyone in the country. Federal scientists carry out lifesaving medical research; monitor and help prepare for severe weather; study pollution impacts to ensure we have effective public health rules; and conduct many other types of studies that help keep us all safe, healthy, and prosperous.

Under the Trump administration, science is under attack like never before. On the pages that follow, we share just a few of the stories of scientists whose important, public-serving work was callously discarded.

The Union of Concerned Scientists is committed to building a stronger federal scientific enterprise for the future. That includes passing the Scientific Integrity Act in Congress, which would ensure experts like these can do their best work for the people they serve without fear of censorship, manipulation, or retaliation. (See p. 5 to learn how you can help.)





AUBREY PARIS, PhD

Former position: senior policy advisor for gender, climate change, and innovation, the Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues

Current position: director, Parlee Center, Ursinus College

My portfolio with the Office of Global Women's Issues covered the ways climate change affects women.

I worked with different State Department bureaus to understand how the "gender-climate nexus" affected their topic or their region, and I coordinated across 14 different federal agencies to develop policy and strategy. I did a lot of travel, meeting with partners in different countries, and training State Department staff through the Foreign Service Institute.

My office created the Innovation Station initiative, helping to identify women—including scientists and entrepreneurs—who were developing solutions to climate and energy challenges in their countries. In many places women are noticing these challenges first and know their community enough to identify and come up with solutions to problems. We helped them share their work locally and build relationships internationally. That's some of the work I'm proudest of: helping promote these women and expand the impact of their innovations.

Our work was under attack from Inauguration Day. With little guidance and an overall atmosphere of fear, all of our colleagues proactively self-censored. It seemed like the administration wanted women's empowerment work to disappear without having to say it explicitly.

On Easter Sunday 2025, the *New York Times* leaked the State Department reorganization plan, and we weren't on it. That's how we knew it was over.

We've lost hundreds of years of expertise, years of hard work, and academic and professional expertise in how to effectively advance women's rights and empowerment in ways that benefit all of society.



LUZ CUMBIA GARCÍA, PhD

Former position: AAAS Science & Technology Policy Fellow and advisor for sustainability, US Department of State

Current position: founder, SciPolicy Global Strategies

When I was a PhD student, I learned about science fellowships in federal service. I thought it was so cool that you could create a tangible positive impact on society by informing public policies, with science as the backbone. I knew I wanted to do that.

I started with the US Agency for International Development (USAID), supporting research projects for scientists working together in the Middle East. During on-site visits, it was beautiful and mind-blowing to see Palestinian and Israeli scientists doing research side by side.

I also worked as a health advisor between the United States and Mexico on global health and outbreak responses. And then I joined the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) as a sustainability advisor, with the goal of helping the countries we were supporting start to undertake this programming on their own.

PEPFAR is one of the most successful global health programs in the world. It's saved the lives of 26 million people who are HIV-positive. Just seeing the impact of delivering lifesaving medication to these patients—it was amazing. It was my dream job, and I wanted to keep doing that for a long time. That was the work I was focused on when my role ended.

PEPFAR still exists, but changes in funding levels can have real implications for program continuity and patient access. The potential downstream effects on patients and health systems are significant.

The United States benefits economically, socially, and diplomatically from helping and working with other countries, and science is an effective diplomatic tool. Sustained investment in science and global partnerships is critical for maintaining US leadership and addressing our shared challenges.



MELINDA LAITURI, PhD

Former position: Jefferson Science Fellow, US Department of State; federal contractor

Current position: retired

In 2014, I started a yearlong program—the Jefferson Science Fellowship—with the State Department. My division created maps based on both satellite data and community-based information to help decisionmakers place humanitarian resources and infrastructure where they're needed.

As a professor at Colorado State, one important aspect of collaborating with the federal government was what you could bring back to your teaching, your research, the institution—to show young people how issues of policy relate to science. The ability to share what I knew was incredible.

More recently, I was a contractor working with the State Department on the Secondary Cities Initiative, a follow-on from my fellowship. This is a global network of geospatial experts working together to tackle issues like security, resilience, and disaster response. I've traveled all over the world for this work. Through this project, I've worked with regional environmental officers serving at US embassies. I've developed partnerships with people on the ground, including helping cities and universities develop maps. The Secondary Cities Initiative gave rise to an important COVID-19 mapping and mitigation project. The on-the-ground experts I've met were amazing people, with local knowledge and expertise, who were able to make the Secondary Cities Project possible.

Our initiative recently submitted a proposal for a grant from USAID, and then USAID went away. Now it's on hold. So much of what I did was built on this network and these partnerships. The relationships are strong enough to maintain, but the funding to support that work is gone. I still am in touch with many of the colleagues I worked with around the world. A lot of them are just mystified by what's happening in the United States.



TOM DILIBERTO

Former position: public affairs specialist/climate scientist/meteorologist, NOAA

Current position: media director, Climate Central

I've known I wanted to be a meteorologist since I was in third grade. For me, there's meaning in providing information for families and communities that they can use to stay safe. I wanted to help people, and that's why I went into federal service.

I was working at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration when I was fired. It's a weird experience to see all the work that you did just—poof—disappear within six months. My entire career has been almost completely wiped away. And it's not just me. It's the people forecasting your weather, making sure your seafood is safe to eat, anyone doing research on climate.

It took decades to build up some of these programs, and now the people aren't there to be able to do it. You can't just stop research and restart it in 5 or 10 years. As taxpayers, we pay for these services, and we're getting a degraded service. We'll see the impact of that, which is that people are going to get hurt needlessly.

The United States was lucky last year because we didn't have too many extreme weather events happen. But we can't count on that. So, whether we see hurricanes this year, heat waves, or wildfires, I have less trust that the government can do what it needs to do. The people in government who are still there are going to try their best. But there's only so much they can do. And that scares me.

Whether that lost expertise can be replaced . . . well, who would want that job now? It's a lot easier to burn something down than it is to build it up. {C}

Seth Michaels is a senior writer at UCS. **Pamela Worth** is senior writing manager at UCS.

California Keeps Its Clean Energy Momentum Going

INTERVIEW WITH RANYEE CHIANG

California is leading the nation's transition to a clean energy future. Last year, the state reached some major milestones: More than 90 percent of days were powered by 100 percent clean energy for at least part of the day, and more than 7.5 percent of passenger vehicles on the road were plug-in electric vehicles (EVs). We spoke with Union of Concerned Scientists Western States Program Director Dr. Ranyee Chiang about how the state is staying committed to this plan while ensuring affordability during a time of rising costs.

How is California's transition to clean energy progressing?

RANYEE CHIANG: There has been exciting progress. Two-thirds of California's electricity is now powered by clean sources. We've set a goal for ourselves of having 100 percent clean energy by 2045. However, each year, we're only adding about half the capacity that we need to reach that ambitious target. With utilities needing to catch up on the delayed costs of safety improvements and the massive costs from increasingly frequent and devastating wildfires, we need to stay committed to the clean energy transition while fixing the already aging and burdened electricity system.

On transportation, we've also seen major progress over recent years. Just a few years ago, EVs were a rare sighting. But in the last three years, over 20 percent of new car sales in California were electric. Used EV sales are also up. As of a year ago, there were almost 50 percent more EV chargers than gasoline nozzles in California. In the Bay Area where I live, we've recently seen the largest order in California for electric trucks, which will be put into operation at the Port of Oakland.

Now's a great time to celebrate the progress that we've made, and also be cognizant that we have more work to do because we are also facing a federal administration that is opposing this

progress. We've lost federal EV incentives that helped consumers with upfront costs. And we may also lose California's authority to set its own vehicle regulations, which has been in place since the Nixon presidency. We know we need to transition off of fossil fuels; however, we also need to manage that transition so consumers, workers, and communities are protected.

California has one of the highest costs of living in the country. How does clean energy factor into conversations about whether California is an affordable place to live?

RANYEE CHIANG: Some have presented a false dichotomy between affordability and environmental and public health. Regulations and fees in California are not the reason we now have an affordability crisis here. Indeed, regulations and fees have stayed relatively constant in recent years, while prices have gone up. Affordability is a complex situation, related to housing, employment, larger global trends, and the climate crisis, but we know that maintaining a focus on clean energy and clean transportation goals can help us address a major piece of the affordability challenge.

Solar and wind projects in California can produce electricity at lower costs than fossil gas plants. The lifetime cost for an EV can be lower than a gasoline car, especially when gas prices are high. Environmental and climate policies in California are saving drivers money



RANYEE CHIANG, PhD, is director of the UCS Western States Program, leading policy efforts across California and the western United States. Her career spans climate policy, equity, and coalition building at the federal level, internationally, and in California. Previously, she led a team of air quality scientists at the Bay Area Air District, expanding air monitoring to be more community-focused and strengthening wildfire forecasting and communications.

Now's a great time to celebrate the progress that we've made, while recognizing that we have more work to do as we face a federal administration that is opposing this progress.

through increased fuel efficiency, transitioning from gasoline to EVs, and hybrid and remote work arrangements. Policies that make us less dependent on gasoline also protect us from prices increasing due to events outside of California's control, like the US-Israel war against Iran.

Given the Trump administration's hostility toward climate and environmental policy, how can state governments and policy fill the void?

RANYEE CHIANG: The climate and environmental rollbacks at the federal level have unfortunately been part of a dismantling of evidence-based decision-making, which is a critical foundation to having a government that can be effective and that can be trusted. This dismantling includes taking down data, ignoring data, and dismantling or replacing mechanisms for scientists to advise the government.

One of the most troubling aspects is that this dismantling includes attacks on federal scientists, and government workers in general [p. 12].

Thankfully, in California and in many states, we are not seeing the disrespect and dismissal of government. The various state, regional, and local government agencies in California have smart and dedicated public servants, including scientists in government, who are continuing their climate and environmental work despite the chaos and disruption at the federal level.

We can establish scientific integrity policies at the state and local levels to keep science independent from political influence. And, when possible, states can fill research funding gaps. For example, California Senate Bill 895, if approved and signed, would give Californians the chance to vote in November on a \$23 billion bond to fund scientific research.

Where does UCS see the greatest opportunities to make an impact in California?

RANYEE CHIANG: There are so many important issues that are deservedly getting a lot of attention, especially in a year when we have a governor's race in California. Housing, jobs, affordability, public transportation, clean transportation, wildfires, AI, data centers. How can we address so many different massive issues without getting overwhelmed?

This is where UCS brings the most value: using our scientific analyses to address complex problems systematically and holistically. A good example is Assembly Bill 2672, which UCS sponsored this year to address gas prices and help low-income families access clean transportation options, while continuing the longer-term transition away from fossil fuels. {C}

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What If a Data Center Is Proposed for Your Town?

By Eric Schulz

Data center proposals are popping up across the country, bolstering the proliferation of generative artificial intelligence engines like OpenAI’s ChatGPT and Anthropic’s Claude. The hunger for power associated with this boom is staggering: Data center electricity use has doubled in just six years and is projected to double again by 2028. The national race to meet that power demand is on.

A UCS analysis published earlier this year, *Data Center Power Play*, shows that current policies could lead decision-makers to rely on polluting fossil fuels to meet data centers’ power needs—despite it being possible to meet this demand primarily with clean energy. (Learn more at act.ucs.org/sum26-data-centers.) A separate UCS analysis revealed that

families and businesses were forced to pay billions in higher electricity bills just to connect data centers to the power grid.

A continuation of the status quo would mean more toxic fossil fuels and higher costs for households. Luckily, UCS research and the historical record make it clear it doesn’t have to be this way.

IT AIN’T OVER ‘TIL IT’S OVER

Communities have real power in vetting data center proposals. But first, “Folks need to know when these projects are being proposed, because the public deserves a seat at the table when setting the terms for how these data centers operate,” says María Fernanda Chávez, UCS energy analyst and a coauthor of the *Data Center Power Play* report.

If a community must consider accommodating the strain that the tremendous amounts of energy required to power a data center will place on local resources, it should also have the right to demand that energy be generated, delivered, and consumed in the most responsible way possible. The goal should be to prevent spikes in utility bills while protecting residents’ health and the climate from being harmed by toxic, high-polluting fuel sources.

Last year, more than two dozen communities across the United States successfully fought back against data center proposals that failed to sufficiently address their priorities.

Part of the challenge in debating these proposals is the wide range of policy-makers engaged in the decisionmaking process. There is no single, universal entity that grants final approval, which can make it challenging to know where to start. “At every level, elected officials should be putting your best interests first—and it’s important they hear your voice loud and clear,” says Chávez.

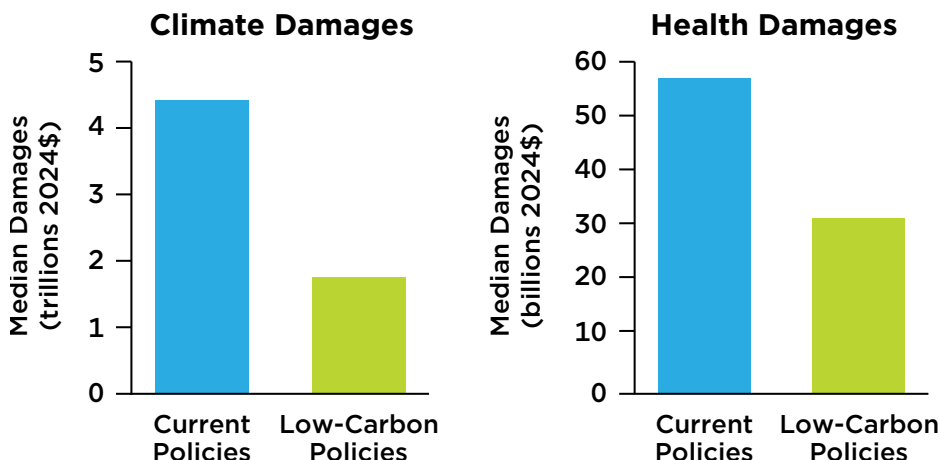
Remember: Nothing is inevitable. A proposal alone does not guarantee a data center project will be seen through to completion. The number of data centers anticipated to be built, and how much electricity they will consume, are both highly uncertain. Advocating for your priorities with your own personal story can make the difference in determining *if* and *how* a data center near you comes to fruition.

See the next page for five steps you can take to make your voice heard in defense of your community. {C}

Eric Schulz is a strategic communications officer at UCS.

DATA CENTER IMPACTS 2026–2050

Adopting clean energy policies would greatly reduce the impacts of powering data centers, avoiding nearly \$2.7 trillion in cumulative damages.



FIVE STEPS FOR CONFRONTING DATA CENTER THREATS

1. LEARN ABOUT THE IMPACTS

UCS has published an extensive body of work on the costs of the AI boom. You can read our articles about the environmental and financial impacts here:
act.ucs.org/sum26-ai-boom

2. FIND LOCAL PROPOSALS

While there is no single comprehensive source to see proposals, there are a variety of ways to research potential projects: local news reports, social media, utility planning websites, or online industry maps.

3. WRITE A BRIEF STATEMENT

Emphasize why you care about the decision at hand, make clear what your concerns are, and identify what criteria you see as non-negotiable for a proposal to move forward.

4. IDENTIFY YOUR TARGETS

Consider policymakers who represent you at the local, state, and federal levels. Being specific when addressing your concerns directly to them, and reminding them that they are accountable to you—i.e., you are one of their constituents—will make your message resonate.

5. MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD

- **online**, by emailing your targets
- **over the phone**, to their constituent service staff
- **in person**, at a city council meeting's public comment session or a town hall hosted by your member of Congress
- **in print**, by submitting a letter to the editor of your local newspaper

FEMA Is in Trouble. So Are We.

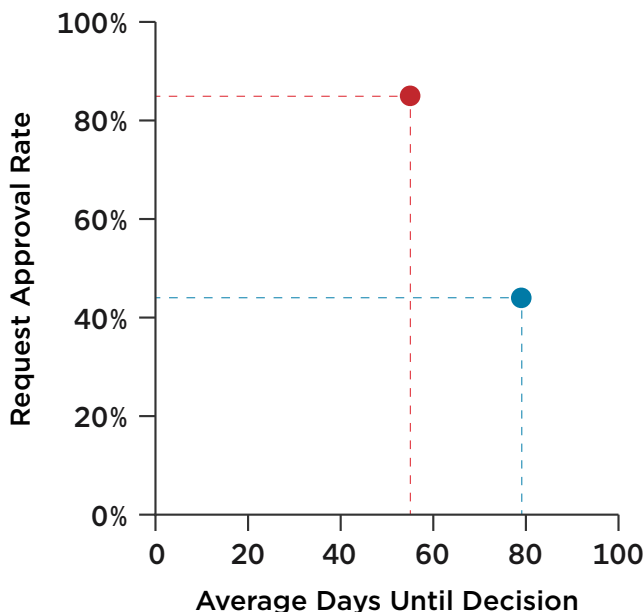
(continued from p. 11)



Pacific, Washington, applied for FEMA assistance after floodwaters inundated the city in December 2025. FEMA took 156 days to respond, and denied the request.

HOW DISASTER AID IS BEING POLITICIZED

Research from the Urban Institute found that, as of May 28, states whose electoral votes went to President Trump (red dot) have received disaster relief far more quickly and more often than other states (blue dot) during the second Trump administration.



Alongside its efforts to strip down FEMA, the administration is reversing climate policies and relentlessly attacking federal agencies like the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration, which studies and informs people about climate change and extreme weather. The Environmental Protection Agency's mission to protect people from health-harming pollution, including from planet-warming fossil fuels, has been completely upended. And the administration's deliberate failure to throttle back heat-trapping emissions is contributing to more costly and deadly climate impacts. By attacking FEMA, this administration is not only failing to ensure the country can recover from devastating extreme weather, it's doing so while taking steps to guarantee such weather will be progressively more destructive.

"Not only am I concerned about upcoming climate extremes, but also about the impact of the 'super' El Niño expected later this year," says Udvardy. "And all of this comes on top of recent years' billion-dollar disasters—in 2025, we saw 23 separate disasters totaling \$116 billion with 276 lives lost."

It should go without saying that the country needs a well-funded and competently led FEMA. But the Trump administration's "restructuring"—leading to an understaffed agency that has lost much of its top expertise in a super El Niño year—is akin to taking a ship apart while sailing into a tsunami.

"I am hopeful that the courts and Congress will continue to hold this administration accountable, but that takes time," says Udvardy. "Communities are waiting for grant funding and disaster assistance. The stakes are too high for us to simply hope the Trump administration will stop short of dismantling FEMA." {C}

Michelle Rama-Poccia is a senior bilingual writer and podcast host at UCS.

Calling All Grandparents: The Time to Give Is Now



David Lane has two daughters, four grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren—and he's concerned about their future, and Earth's. An Oregonian who's witnessed climate change worsening wildfires and causing more extreme weather on the West Coast, David is committed to doing all he can to preserve a livable planet.

"My great-grandchildren are four years and four months old. I'm focused on what

the world will be like for them in their teens, 20s, 30s, and beyond," he says. "But I don't just want to do something for them. I want to encourage a movement of grandparents to act *now* to help improve the world."

Many people his age save their wealth and plan to distribute it once they pass away, David says, but the urgency of climate change creates a moral imperative to give immediately.

"A lot of grandparents—and even those who don't have children or grandchildren but care about the world's young people—may be in a similar situation to me, with some assets to share. We really don't need to wait 5, 10, or 20 years to do something good with them."

David is a retired social worker who is active in local politics and in the governance of the senior living community where he lives; currently, he's rallying his fellow residents to invest in wildfire hardening measures for the property. He's supported the Union of Concerned Scientists for more than 10 years, in part because he knows he can trust UCS to

use his contributions wisely to fight for progress on climate change.

"UCS is highly rated by charity ratings organizations. They do what they say they're going to do," he says.

Recently, David has chosen to contribute to UCS from his individual retirement account (IRA). In 2026, the US Internal Revenue Service allows individuals to donate up to \$111,000 from their IRAs, which can include one's required minimum distribution (RMD), without paying taxes on the contribution—what David describes as a win-win. He sees donating to organizations like UCS as an important part of his regular expenses.

And ultimately, as he sees carbon emissions rising instead of falling, and political leaders dismantling science-based climate policies, he hopes more grandparents will get on board with giving to organizations committed to preserving our environment now.

"You could wait and put it in your will," David says. "Or we could do something good for our grandchildren before it's too late." {C}

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Trump's Military Spending Is a "Bloody New Deal"

By Sean Manning



In April, President Trump released his budget request for fiscal year 2027. It includes a whopping *\$1.5 trillion* for defense—up more than \$400 billion from last year.

What the president has

proposed, if enacted and sustained, would be among the largest discretionary spending increases in modern US history, and analysis shows it could add almost \$7 trillion to the national debt over the next decade. The long-term cost remains uncertain because the budget includes \$350 billion in one-time “reconciliation” funding, potentially easing the concerns of congressional budget hawks.

In an era of illegal wars overseas and National Guard deployments in US cities, Trump’s plan would hand billions of additional dollars to defense contractors and their lobbyists. This unparalleled increase in financial power—and the political influence that goes along with it—could militarize our country in ways not seen since World War II. It’s a gift to the military-industrial complex we might call a “Bloody New Deal.”

This deal stands alone in scope. If sustained over the next 10 years, it will cost roughly seven times as much as President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act (although many of its provisions have been rolled back by the Trump administration), four times as much as President Obama’s Affordable Care Act, and twice as much as President Trump’s One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

The true costs of such a massive spending plan become even clearer when you compare it to what else the government could get for its money. For roughly \$7 trillion over 10 years, the United States could simultaneously fund all of the following:

- 29 million children receiving Medicaid
- 11.5 million new public housing units
- 6 million people receiving paid parental leave
- 5.9 million new Head Start slots for children
- 1.2 million new firefighters
- 1 million new elementary school teachers
- More than 750,000 new registered nurses

As *Catalyst* went to press, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth was meeting with senators, telling them he would need \$80 billion to continue funding the war against Iran—on top of the \$1.5 trillion in military spending the Trump administration had already requested. Although this is a different way of increasing the defense budget, the outcome would be much the same. The war on Iran has been estimated to cost the United States between \$1 billion and \$2 billion *per day* (to say nothing of the long-term human, economic, and reputational costs that are hard or impossible to quantify).

Opponents of these requests should be unflinching in defining them as a blank check for the same military contractors who cannot deliver ships on time, munitions at scale, or audits that are clean. Pouring unprecedented funds



Sailors prepare to stage ordnance on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier in preparation for attacks on Iran, which had been engaging in diplomatic talks on its nuclear program before US strikes.

into a defense sector that has repeatedly failed basic tests of accountability will not miraculously produce innovation.

As the Trump administration has made clear its willingness to use our military in illegal wars of choice and in shows of force on US soil, the stakes of pumping unprecedented funds into the military-industrial complex have never been higher. {C}

Sean Manning is a former Herbert Scoville Jr. Peace Fellow in the UCS Global Security Program. His research focuses on the economic trade-offs of defense spending.

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