

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

IN THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DEPARTMENT OF APPLIED PHYSICS AND APPLIED MATHEMATICS

Mr. Brian Stone
Chief of Staff, National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22314

March 12, 2026

Dear Chief of Staff Stone,

I am writing in response to the Dear Colleague Letter of January 23, "NSF Intent to Restructure Critical Weather Infrastructure." I object in the strongest terms to the premise. NCAR is a tremendous national asset, and to dismantle it would do a grave disservice to the United States.

I am an atmospheric scientist. I received my Ph.D. at MIT (1998) and I have been a professor at Columbia University since 2000. During my entire career, I and my students have benefited from the existence of NCAR, in all its various dimensions and activities. As a graduate student myself in the 1990s, I attended a summer school there, which greatly expanded my knowledge of the field. As a faculty member, I have attended workshops at NCAR, and been a visitor in residence at its Mesoscale and Microscale Meteorology Division one summer. Throughout my career I have participated in field campaigns which NCAR's Earth Observing Laboratory has managed, as well as using the aircraft, radars, and other observational platforms that they maintain. For many years my group has used the Community Earth System Model (CESM) for a wide range of purposes. And we have used the NCAR supercomputers in many research projects. In case it is not obvious, these activities span weather and climate, and also observations, models, and theory.

For more than a dozen years, I have worked closely with companies in the insurance and reinsurance industry. Many of these companies use CESM, and also various other datasets maintained by NCAR. The recent ICECHIP field program, to take just one example, was designed in part to address industry needs on managing hail risk. National Weather Service forecasts --- and thus also forecasts by private weather companies, since those incorporate guidance from NOAA and NWS --- also will depend, going forward, on the MPAS model developed and maintained at NCAR.

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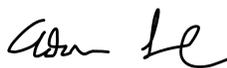
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It is clear from these and many other examples that the resources NCAR provides generate great value in the private as well as the public sectors. What is perhaps less obvious, but nonetheless true, is that none of them would work as well as they do if they were not part of a larger national center. The sum of all the various activities enable NCAR to draw the best talent, not just for its own staff but into the many collaborative activities it does. The supercomputer center runs better because its staff directly understand the needs of the scientists using the computers, since they are part of the same institution. The field campaigns are more effective at connecting to model development efforts for the same reason, and so on. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. And the Mesa Lab, as the flagship of the physical campus, is the nerve center of all of it. The rest will not hold together without it.

Finally, I have been seeing reports in the news that the Administration's intent here is to privatize parts of NCAR. I object to this not just as a scientist, but as a U.S. citizen. NCAR was funded by the U.S. taxpayer for the benefit of the public, and to the public it should belong. Putting any of it in private hands would amount to taking away what belongs to the public for the benefit of particular individuals.

NCAR enables synergies and creates value across many sectors, for business and government and individuals, in the U.S. and worldwide, by virtue of its centralization and its unique stature as a national and global center for the atmospheric and related sciences. To dismantle it would greatly harm not just science, but also the U.S. economy and well-being. I urge in the strongest terms that NCAR be kept whole as a public asset.

Sincerely,



Adam Sobel