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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

ADAM TOMLINSON, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR
DAN DUDIS, DEMOCRATIC STAFF DIRECTOR

March 4, 2025

The Honorable Lee M. Zeldin
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Zeldin:

On February 26, 2025, President Trump said that you planned to fire 65 percent of staff at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).¹ Hours later, a White House spokesperson stated that the President misspoke and that you instead planned to cut EPA spending by 65 percent.² You then doubled down a day later, telling *Spectrum News* in an interview that you had shared with President Trump that a 65 percent budget cut was a “low number” and that you believe “that the EPA can save even more than 65 percent of our budget year over year.”³

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) released a memorandum on February 26, 2025 outlining a multi-month process for reducing the size of the federal workforce.⁴ The Agency Reduction in Force and Reorganization Plan (ARRP) process detailed in this memo requires agency heads to submit “Phase 1 ARRPs” and “Phase 2 ARRPs” to provide an accounting of the agency’s reduction in force (RIF) plans, including numerical data and justification. Those submissions are due on March 13 and April 14 of this year, respectively.

¹ Robin Bravender, “Trump: EPA boss expects to cut 65 percent of staff,” *E&E News by Politico* (Feb. 26, 2025), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/02/26/trump-epa-boss-expects-to-cut-65-percent-of-staff-00206230>.

² Alex Guillén, “White House says Trump meant EPA will cut 65 percent of spending, not staff,” *E&E News by Politico* (Feb. 26, 2025), <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/02/26/white-house-says-trump-meant-epa-will-cut-65-percent-of-spending-not-staff-00206228>.

³ Robin Bravender, “Zeldin: 65 percent EPA budget cut is a ‘low number,’” *E&E News by Politico* (Feb. 27, 2025), [POLITICO Pro | Article | Zeldin: 65 percent EPA budget cut is ‘a low number’](https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/2025/02/27/zeldin-65-percent-epa-budget-cut-is-a-low-number).

⁴ U.S. Office of Personnel Management & U.S. Office of Management and Budget, *Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans Requested by Implementing The President’s “Department of Government Efficiency” Workforce Optimization Initiative* (Feb 26, 2025) https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/latest-memos/guidance-on-agency-rif-and-reorganization-plans-requested-by-implementing-the-president-s-department-of-government-efficiency-workforce-optimization-initiative.pdf?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTEAAR0i9XEhXQMzWex4mhUHwXE50RBQQq-hqB08c4kxp71YobjjMpr2_A-DwJw_aem_5Fg3HvIF7J1KtHDAAbFwZg.

Your intention to do either of these things—fire large numbers of EPA staff or proceed with deep budget cuts—raises serious concerns. EPA could not fulfill its mission of protecting our air and water and preventing toxic pollution if its staff *or* budget were cut by 65 percent.⁵ Moreover, you do not have legal authority to set EPA’s spending levels; that power is reserved under Article I of the Constitution to Congress.

Finally, any decision to fire large numbers of EPA staff calls into question the probity of the statements you made on this subject at your confirmation hearing not even two months ago. Each time you were asked about your plans for agency staffing, you assured Committee members that you looked forward to working “collaboratively” with EPA’s dedicated staff. Notably, you were pressed on this point because individuals closely affiliated with President Trump were championing mass firings even before he took office. On November 15, 2024, for example, *Forbes* reported that Elon Musk had stated that he would seek to cut up to 75% of federal agencies and implement workforce reductions similar to those he implemented at Twitter, where he cut 80% of staff.⁶ During your confirmation hearing, you also told members of the Committee on eight separate occasions that you would “not prejudge[e] outcomes” or made substantially identical statements.⁷ It is difficult to understand how a decision to cut two-thirds of a federal agency’s staff or budget when Trump-affiliated groups had been urging a similar course of action since before President Trump even took office is anything other than a “prejudged outcome.”

Accordingly, in order to assist in our investigation of statements by both the White House and you that you plan to eliminate 65 percent of EPA staff or cut agency spending by 65 percent or more, please respond to the following questions no later than March 11, 2025.

1. Are President Trump’s comments that EPA plans to fire approximately 65 percent of its staff accurate?
2. Is the White House statement that you plan to cut EPA spending by 65 percent accurate? If not, is the 65 percent estimate too low or too high? Please explain in detail your plans for cutting EPA spending.
3. If President Trump’s statements related to EPA staffing are not accurate, what are your plans for complying with the OMB/OPM ARRP memo and what percentage of EPA staff are you planning on firing? Please detail your layoff plans (dates employees will be fired and number of employees to be fired) across EPA’s various divisions (Office of the Administrator (OA), Office of Air and Radiation (OAR), Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention (OCSPP), Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), Office of

⁵ See, e.g., Emma Gardner and Maria Hegsted, “GAO Warns Of Staff Shortages In ‘High Risk’ Policy Areas As Cuts Continue,” *InsideEPA* (Feb. 25, 2025), <https://insideepa.com/transition-2025/249266>.

⁶ Jack Kelly, “Federal Employees Brace for Potential Mass Layoffs in Trump’s Second Term,” *Forbes* (Nov. 15, 2024), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2024/11/15/federal-employees-brace-for-potential-mass-layoffs-in-trumps-second-term/>.

⁷ U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, *Hearing on the Nomination of the Honorable Lee M. Zeldin to be Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency* (Feb. 27, 2025), https://www.epw.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/c/4/c4282a20-59a6-4523-bcd3-f692ffd133c9/BA023DD60A07E4B417B6DA9813A57307AECB8171E9B518601F316BC288B4C10F.spw-01162025-nomination-of-hon-lee-zeldin-.pdf

Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA), Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights (OEJECR), Office of General Counsel (OGC), Office of Inspector General (OIG), Office of International and Tribal Affairs (OITA), Office of Land and Emergency Management (OLEM), Office of Mission Support (OMS), Office of Research and Development (ORD), Office of Water (OW), and EPA's ten Regional Offices).

4. If President Trump's statements related to EPA staffing are accurate, when did EPA determine that it would eliminate approximately 65 percent of EPA? How did EPA determine that a 65 percent reduction in staff was appropriate? Was this your own determination as Administrator, or the recommendation of other officials or outside groups? Please list any parties—whether inside or outside the Trump Administration—who were consulted on EPA's planning regarding layoffs. Provide any communications (including but not limited to emails, text messages, and memoranda)—dating from November 1, 2024 to present—between and among the EPA and White House officials, members of the Trump 2024 campaign, members of the Trump-Vance Transition Team, OMB staff, OPM staff, Elon Musk, individuals affiliated with the so-called "Department of Government Efficiency," Mandy Gunasekara, or Russell Vought concerning EPA's RIF plans.
5. Please describe how you believe that any largescale firing of EPA employees will "support career staff who have dedicated" themselves to EPA's mission and "foster a collaborative culture within the agency," as you pledged under oath to do during your confirmation hearing.
6. If the White House statement that you plan to cut EPA spending by 65 percent is accurate, as it seems to be based on your follow-up statement that 65 percent may be an underestimate, please provide the legal authority for making such a budget cut. We note that any Executive Order or executive branch memorandum does not have the force of law, and so are requesting that you cite to specific statutory or Constitutional language that provides you such authority.
7. Do you agree that, under the Constitution, it is Congress that has the power to set spending levels and determine how appropriated funds will be spent?
8. Please itemize the 65 percent (or more) spending reduction that you are planning to implement. Please list all programs you plan to cut and the amounts of money you plan to save from each by fiscal year. Please also detail your planned spending reductions (amounts by fiscal year) across EPA's various divisions (Office of the Administrator (OA), Office of Air and Radiation (OAR), Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention (OCSP), Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance (OECA), Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights (OEJECR), Office of General Counsel (OGC), Office of Inspector General (OIG), Office of International and Tribal Affairs (OITA), Office of Land and Emergency Management (OLEM), Office of Mission Support (OMS), Office of Research and Development (ORD), Office of Water (OW), and EPA's ten Regional Offices).

Thank you for your cooperating in this matter.

Sincerely,



Sheldon Whitehouse
United States Senator
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment
and Public Works



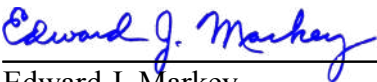
Angela Alsobrooks
United States Senator



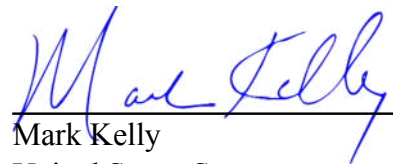
Bernard Sanders
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Mark Kelly
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator



Lisa Blunt Rochester
United States Senator

cc: Sen. Shelley Moore Capito
Chairman, Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works