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## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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February 6, 2025

The Honorable Pete Hegseth  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20301

Ms. Robyn S. Colosimo, P.E.  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army  
(Performing the Duties of the Assistant  
Secretary of the Army for Civil Works)  
U.S. Department of Defense  
108 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310

Lt. Gen. William H. "Butch" Graham, Jr.  
Chief of Engineers and Commanding General  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers  
2600 Army Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20310

Dear Secretary Hegseth, Lieutenant General Graham, and Ms. Colosimo:

I write to request information regarding the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' action to release water from Terminus Dam and Schafer Dam in California's Central Valley over the weekend of January 31, 2025. I am deeply concerned that the action was not undertaken in the pursuit of any legitimate water supply or flood control objectives, but to advance a political narrative and for a photo opportunity. Notwithstanding the wasting of billions of gallons of our most precious resource, a full explanation for the Corps' abrupt action has still not been provided to Congress and local officials.

On January 27, 2025, President Trump posted on social media that the "United States Military just entered" California and "TURNED ON THE WATER" (capitalization from original post). Then, on January 31, 2025, President Trump posted a photo along with the caption: "Photo of beautiful water flow that I just opened in California."

On January 31, according to Army Corps data, water outflows from reservoirs at Lake Kaweah and Lake Success went from nearly nothing to more than 1,500 cubic feet per second and 1,000 cubic feet per second, respectively. According to President Trump's social media posts, these releases were made to purportedly help with fire management efforts in Southern California. In a media statement, the Army Corps asserted that these releases were done "Consistent with the Executive Order" of the President "to ensure California has water available to respond to the wildfires." This statement affirmed the President's use of executive power for the water releases as well as his reasoning for doing so.

The President's use of executive authority to compel the Corps to make these releases raises several concerns. First, although the President's own statements suggest he ordered the Army Corps to make these releases to aid with wildfire management efforts in Southern California, the waterways and ditches into which the water was released do not connect to Southern California waterways or reservoirs. The water released from the two Central Valley dams has therefore ended up in dry lakebeds, and much of the water has already seeped into the ground.

Second, local water managers and elected officials in the Central Valley received little to no advance notification or consultation concerning these water releases. In fact, it has been reported that the water releases would have been even larger had local officials not pleaded with the Corps and the Trump Administration to reduce the flow. As you know, water releases such as these require coordination with local officials in order to account for flood risk and public safety. It appears these risks were not discussed with local officials prior to the releases.

Third, farmers in the Central Valley rely on reservoirs like those at Lake Kaweah and Lake Success to irrigate crops in the summer. California's Central Valley provides 25 percent of America's food supply. These water resources are crucial for helping agricultural producers get through dry seasons.

Finally, I am concerned that the experts at the Corps – professional engineers with decades of decorated public service as civilians and enlisted soldiers – were overridden by political leadership with no knowledge or experience in managing water infrastructure or flood control. I worry that this action sets a dangerous precedent wherein the Army Corps' lifesaving public safety mission is micromanaged by political appointees with no experience in this area.

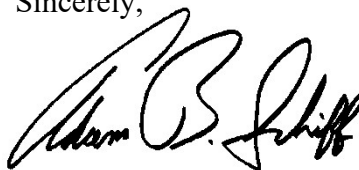
In California, water is an extremely precious resource. My constituents are continuously facing vicious cycles of drought and unprecedented wildfires fueled by climate change. In the face of these challenges, President Trump ordered the Army Corps to drain water from California's reservoirs. Through this action, President Trump is responsible for a loss of at least 2.2 billion gallons of water that could have been used by California families and farmers.

Therefore, I request the following information from the U.S. Department of Defense and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by February 20, 2025:

1. Did the Corps perform any sort of impact analysis before initiating these water releases?
2. Did the Corps coordinate with any other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, before initiating these water releases? If so, what did this coordination consist of?
3. Did the Corps consider how these water releases might affect water and irrigation supplies for agricultural producers before initiating these water releases?
4. Before initiating these water releases, did the Corps provide an explanation to anyone in the Executive Office of the President or to any political appointee that the water releases from the reservoirs at Lake Kaweah and Lake Success would not reach Southern California, would not be used to help wildfire suppression, and would end up being wasted?
5. Did the Corps have any concerns about flooding California communities, concerns about risks to public safety, or concerns about dam and levee integrity before initiating these water releases? Has the Corps observed any impacts following the releases?
6. To what degree was Mr. Elon Musk or representatives from the "Department of Government Efficiency" or "United States DOGE Service" involved in these water releases? Did the Corps communicate at all with Mr. Musk or "DOGE" about these water releases?

Additionally, I request that the Corps provide a briefing to my staff that fully explains the rationale for the water releases no later than February 20, 2025. Thank you for your response.

Sincerely,



Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator