Photo of the Day | Miniature mountains all across campus



Students walk on a snow-covered Fairfield Way at the UConn Storrs campus on Jan. 28, 2026. The campus is covered with snow after the weekend's storm.
PHOTO BY MADISON HENDRICKS, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Patrick's Politics:

How Trump has made planning for storms worse

SNOWFLAKE CLIPART COURTESY OF PUBLIC DOMAIN

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If you were anywhere in New England or indeed much of America this past weekend, you were probably walloped by a massive snowfall thanks to Winter Storm Fern – or Benjamin, if you go by the local news. Every town, Storrs included, was surely wondering how much snow they would get and when they would get it. This crucial part of the weather season, however right the predictions ended up being, has been deeply impacted by the Donald Trump administration's massive cuts to weather services. On top of that, Trump seems bent on making sure we're not prepared for the next storms, as he's attempting to slash climate research resources.

Predicting a winter storm, as any meteorologist can tell you, is already tricky and sometimes confusing. The amount of snow that will fall over any given period of time is difficult to track, especially when the precipitation might switch over to sleet or freezing rain in the blink of an eye. In some cases, snow might fall when it's not even forecasted. Regardless of the specifics, though, predicting these storms is a vital task. The outcome of these predictions can inform cancellations, keep people safe and even save lives. But this apparently didn't matter to the Trump administration – they decided weather services were expendable during their major wave of budget cuts last year.

The budget slashing was led by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), which was never a real department and now no longer functionally exists. As part of DOGE's bloodletting, more than 1,000 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) employees were laid off, some being terminated and some taking buyouts. That means 11% of total NOAA employees at the start of Trump's second term are now gone. The effect is disproportionate in the National Weather Service, a part of NOAA which gathers data for meteorologists all across the country. 17% of NWS staff were laid off, resulting in extensive vacancies in an agency that was already short-staffed.



A snowman stands outside the nations's capitol building in Washington D.C. The effects of Winter Storm Fern have been felt across the nation this week.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @ABCNEWS ON INSTAGRAM

The reason why these cuts are so detrimental to predicting the weather is rather simple. The NWS operates 122 weather forecasting stations, all of which send out at least two weather balloons per day to catalogue conditions – or at least they would ideally. Because of staffing vacancies, several stations are only able to send out one balloon, which decreases the amount of data meteorologists have to make their predictions. This, in turn, lowers the reliability of those forecasts. Reliability is crucial for understanding how winter storms will impact communities and their operations. Cities and towns need reliable weather data to accurately issue warnings and keep their denizens protected.

Trump's weather-related cuts are not just confined to affecting in-the-moment predictions. His administration is also trying to slash funding for climate research, which could impact our understanding of weather forecasts for years in the future. According to an article from CNN, Trump's budget request for 2026 included eliminating all of NOAA's research laboratories, which do extremely important work on tracking the effects of climate change. These research facilities also include the National Severe Storms Laboratory, which is dedicated to improving the accuracy of forecasting extreme weather events like the recent Winter Storm Fern.

Luckily, Congress largely rejected Trump's budget plan for NOAA, but it doesn't change the intent of the administration's attempt. Trump has long considered climate funding unnecessary. Last week, he claimed that Winter Storm Fern was proof that climate change is a hoax, which is quite wrong (the increased volatility of winter weather is itself a likely effect of aggravated climate change). The motivation to slash weather and climate funding is clear: Trump thinks climate change isn't a problem, so he's willing to sacrifice it for the abstract goal of government savings. But, as Winter Storm Fern showed in its churn across America, we need more research than ever on extreme weather events and the effects of climate change. The storm caused 44 deaths in 13 states, and nearly 400,000 customers were still without power as of January 28, a few days after the main snowfall. This is not something the U.S. government can stick its fingers in its ears about and ignore.

The threats to weather prediction and climate funding, although they've gone largely under the radar due to all the other terrible policies propagated by the Trump administration, are real and concerning. The recent winter storm has reminded us that extreme weather poses a major danger, and other devastating events like floods, droughts and hurricanes will continue to do so. With NOAA and NWS resources under attack, we must remain aware of the danger our changing climate can pose.