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# The Trump admin is closing a critical research center. Officials believe it's really trying to punish a governor

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The National Center for Atmospheric Research's Mesa Laboratory, in Boulder, Colo. The Trump administration announced on Tuesday that it intends to shut down this facility and break up NCAR. *(John Greim/LightRocket/Getty Images)*



**NEW ORLEANS** — Stress balls were the swag item of choice at the National Center for Atmospheric Research's booth Wednesday morning, during the world's largest gathering of climate scientists.

NCAR representatives came to this meeting — the convention of the American Geophysical Union — to talk about their research, which is crucial to the climate and weather community. Instead, they've ended up fielding questions about Trump administration plans to break up this Boulder, Colorado-based center, which conducts research and maintains supercomputing facilities on behalf of the government and 129 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada.

The impending breakup of NCAR, first reported by USA Today and **announced**

center's climate programs while maintaining its supercomputing facilities and weather-related programs.

In his post on X, Vought called the center “one of the largest sources of climate alarmism in the country.”

But three officials close to the matter suspect the administration's action against NCAR — and the potentially hundreds of layoffs it would result in — is related to the White House's anger over Colorado Gov. Jared Polis' refusal to release **Tina Peters**, a former election official and prominent 2020 election denier, from prison.

Peters, the former Republican clerk of Mesa, Colorado, was found guilty last year on state charges of participating in a criminal scheme with fellow election deniers to breach her county's secure voting systems, in hopes of proving Trump's false claims of massive fraud. She was sentenced to nine years in prison and is serving her sentence at a women's prison in Pueblo, Colorado.

Trump announced last week he was granting Peters a full federal pardon. The federal pardon has no legal impact on her state conviction and incarceration, but the administration has been pressuring Polis and other Colorado officials to set her free.

The White House did not deny the connection.

When asked by CNN whether the plan to close NCAR was really about Governor Polis' refusal to release Peters, a White House official replied, “The Administration is always reviewing its federal funding for alignment with the President's priorities.”

Earlier in the day, the White House had told CNN that “Maybe if Colorado had a governor who actually wanted to work with President Trump, his constituents

Phil Weiser, the Democratic attorney general for Colorado, condemned the Trump administrations actions.

“The president’s attacks on critical scientific research at NCAR, climate action, and Colorado’s voting system are unprecedented and lawless. He may not like Colorado’s voting system or the fact that we take action to protect the integrity of our voting systems,” Weiser said in a statement. “But he has no authority to act in this manner, and we will not be swayed by his efforts to threaten, intimidate, or punish our state. We are already in court defending Colorado and will continue to do so, including, as appropriate, in the face of these latest actions.”

At the AGU conference, researchers also expressed suspicions that climate research is not the only reason NCAR has been targeted. “Something more is going on,” said Antonio Busalacchi, president of the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research.

He noted it would be possible, for example, to shut down NCAR’s climate research programs without parceling its facilities to other locations, presumably in other states. The Trump administration has already sought to move major infrastructure out of Democrat-led Colorado, with the Space Force headquarters slated to move to Alabama.

NCAR is such a respected institution that even some experts who have supported the Trump administration in the past criticized the decision to close it.

Ryan Maue, who briefly served as a top official at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration during Trump’s first term, **denounced the move against NCAR on X**, stating: “If you believe A.I. and numerical weather prediction are important for our economy and national security, then NCAR in Boulder probably is our best bet to compete globally.”

focus is needed, not dismantling.

Created in 1960, the lab feeds models, tools and insights into government agencies including NOAA and NASA. At a town hall meeting last week, NOAA's administrator touted the need to form a closer partnership with NCAR in order to improve the agency's weather modeling, according to an agency staff member who attended.

That work could be put in jeopardy by the center's breakup.

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The NCAR is funded by the National Science Foundation and managed by the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research, which is also in Boulder. As part of the administration's plans, all the center's existing facilities, including its I.M. Pei-designed headquarters in the Boulder foothills, would be shuttered and moved to other locations.

In his social media statement Tuesday, Vought said "vital activities such as weather research" will move to these new locations. In response to an inquiry from CNN, a White House official called NCAR "the premier research stronghold for left-wing climate lunacy," but did not indicate how officials will discern the difference between climate and weather programs when deciding what to continue.

Busalacchi said the center has been the bedrock of atmospheric science innovation for decades, citing the invention of the dropsonde instruments that Hurricane Hunters drop into tropical cyclones to gauge their wind speeds as an example. "NCAR is the jewel in the crown internationally as it pertains to

Busalacchi spoke with CNN from his New Orleans hotel room, where he has set up a mini war room of sorts to coordinate a response from his fellow scientists and conference attendees. “What we’re seeing here is overt effort to cancel freedom of scientific thought and inquiry,” he said. “That should send a chill down the spine of every US citizen.”

Busalacchi said he and his colleagues plan to engage Congress in an effort to fight the administration’s impending moves.

*This story has been updated to include responses from the White House and the state attorney general.*

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CNN’s Marshall Cohen contributed to this story.



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