



**National Weather Service doesn't need any more money, Lubchenco says.
Vows to find "Most efficient and cost effective" operations model for future**

(June 21, 2012) If your training and travel have been cut, and if there are operational vacancies in your office unfilled for months, and if the roof at the Atlanta WFO is leaking, you must be imagining things because NOAA Administrator Lubchenco told the House Appropriations Subcommittee this morning that "the Weather Service is not operating with insufficient funds or in the red." She testified that the NWS is, indeed, fully funded but that the money is simply in the wrong accounts, which will be fixed if the House approves the Administration's reprogramming request. (The Senate Appropriations Committee approved the reprogramming request on Wednesday of this week).

Dr. Lubchenco placed sole blame for the current financial problems on the NWS on senior NWS personnel. "During budget formulation, NWS leadership assured NOAA and Department of Commerce leadership that overall funding was sufficient and that funding was appropriately allocated among NWS accounts."

Although the House is expected to join the Senate in approving the reprogramming request so furloughs this summer can be avoided, Dr. Lubchenco's testimony was not good news for NWS employees – or the nation. Throughout her testimony she promised to develop a new "operations model" for the NWS organization that would rely on technology rather than personnel. She testified that the current operational model was "too inflexible" in light of tight financial times. In her written testimony, Dr. Lubchenco stated:

"The science and technology of weather observing, forecasting and communications have changed dramatically since the current NWS Operational Model was developed and continue to evolve rapidly. It is imperative that our NWS be able to keep pace with these advances and be able to change with the evolving needs of our society. . . Rapid scientific and technological advancement are providing potential solutions that will enable NOAA to better meet our country's needs. . . Our dialogue with the Congress needs to move beyond budget figures to a strategic vision of what our nation needs from the NWS in the 21st century and how we enable the NWS to evolve accordingly and to provide for those needs in the most efficient and cost effective manner. Future NWS budgets need to focus on a broader, end-to-end and comprehensive strategy for weather services. . . . The rapid change of stakeholder needs, accelerating advances in science and technology, along with varying pressures on the federal budget have highlighted the need for the nation's weather service to be agile and quick to meet these needs and infuse new advances, while also being resilient and cost-effective in the face of changing budgets."

At the end of the hearing, Subcommittee Chairman Frank Wolf gave Dr. Lubchenco until 5:30 pm on Monday to answer an additional 65 questions in writing, answers to which the committee needed before it can approve the reprogramming request. "We want to assure employees we can approve reprogramming," he concluded.

On Wednesday, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved DOC's request to reprogram funds from certain NWS and other NOAA accounts to fund salaries and forestall furloughs for the remainder of fiscal year 2012.

In a scathing letter to Acting Secretary Blank, Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Senator Mikulski and Ranking Member Hutchison wrote that although they have approved the requested reprogramming of funds, "the exact shortfall cannot be verified at this time because NWS does not have a complete budget baseline detailing its true operating requirements. This lack of accounting oversight is deeply troubling." They conclude their letter by stating "we remain dissatisfied that the Department and NOAA have not known the true operational costs to support NWS's warning and forecast base, and do not know for how long these budget problems have been occurring. Given this lack of knowledge, we have little assurance that similar budget gimmicks are not happening in other parts of NOAA. This NWS problem reinforces the Committee's suspicions that operational programs throughout NOAA, not just in the NWS, have been underfunded for years."

-NWSEO-

Read the letter to Acting Secretary Blank at: http://nwseo.org/member_news.php