



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

Speaking Points - National Weather Service Furloughs

The National Weather Service Employees Organization represents all nonsupervisory employees of the National Weather Service at Forecast Offices, River Forecast Centers, and specialized forecasting centers across the country.

These employees, are mostly designated as “**emergency/essential,**” and will be among the 12,000 employees of NOAA who will be furloughed this summer for four days, during the height of the severe storm and hurricane seasons.

Few are aware that NOAA has already made dramatic reductions in staffing at the NWS even before sequestration. **Almost 10% of critical NWS positions are currently vacant.**

Forecast offices around the country have serious staffing shortages. These already understaffed offices cannot withstand employee furloughs. On any given day, the forecast offices are only staffed for benign weather; even when fully staffed there are customarily only two forecasters on duty most hours of the day and night who have responsibility to issue scheduled forecasts and to protect an average of 3 million people by keeping an eye for severe weather.

When there is a storm, they call the staff in. **Employees who are in a furlough status cannot, by law, be called into work on a day designated for furlough.** As our union's President was quoted in the Washington Post recently, "you can furlough Federal employees, but you can't furlough the weather."

As our union's President was quoted in the Washington Post recently, "you can furlough Federal employees, but you can't furlough the weather."

What is equally important is that the planned furloughs of NOAA employees, including the thousands of NWS employees who are designated “emergency essential,” is **not financially necessary.** A four-day furlough of the 12,242 NOAA employees will save only \$17.8 million out of a \$5 billion dollar budget. Put this in perspective for the reporters with one of the following analogies:

The savings of these furloughs is a mere 36 cents per \$100 to NOAA's budget. If you were going to buy brakes for your car, would you buy the brakes guaranteed to work 100 percent

of the time for \$100 or would you opt for the breaks that might fail 4 days out of the year and cost \$99.64?

NOAA is opting to take the risk at the expense of the American public to save a mere 36 cents for every hundred dollars of the budget.

OR

The savings of these furloughs is a mere 36 cents per \$100 to NOAA's budget. If you were going to buy a security system for your home, would you buy the one with 100 percent coverage for \$100 or would you opt for the model that leaves windows of risk four days a year and cost \$99.64?

NOAA is opting to take the risk at the expense of the American public to save a mere 36 cents for every hundred dollars of the budget.

The savings at the NWS will only be \$6.6 million of a \$1 billion budget. Thus, the harm to employees (who have not had a raise in three years) and adverse impact on the agency's mission far outweigh the minimal savings. **And there are plenty of other funds that can be used to cover these furloughs through reprogramming (which has been encouraged by both Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Fattah of the House CJS Appropriations Subcommittee).** NOAA plans to distribute \$710.5 million in outside grants this year – of that, only \$95.85million in grants have been awarded to date. NOAA is currently soliciting applications for 21 grants totaling \$59 million on www.grants.gov.

Finally, as far as has been publicly announced, **NOAA is the only entity in the entire Department of Commerce that plans to furlough its employees.**

###