



# The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

## **Congress passes “Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act” Two provisions benefit NWSEO represented employees.**

(April 4, 2017) On Tuesday, Congress gave final approval to a comprehensive bill affecting weather related programs in several NOAA line offices. If signed by the President, two sections of the new law may provide enhanced employment opportunities in the NWS and at the NOAA Aircraft Operations Center, whose civilian employees are represented by NWSEO.

Working with allies in the Senate and House, NWSEO is responsible for including Section 410 in the Act, which will require the NWS to annually provide a report to Congress on the use of contractors at the NWS. Presently, there are approximately 1,000 contractors who are employed by the NWS rather than civil service employees, often through the use of illegal personal service contracts. The NWS will be required to report to Congress and publish on the Internet:

- (1) The total number of full-time equivalent employees at the National Weather Service, disaggregated by each equivalent level of the General Schedule.*
- (2) The total number of full-time equivalent contractors at the National Weather Service, disaggregated by each equivalent level of the General Schedule that most closely approximates their duties.*
- (3) The total number of vacant positions at the National Weather Service on the day before the date of enactment of this Act, disaggregated by each equivalent level of the General Schedule.*
- (4) The 5 most common positions filled by full-time equivalent contractors at the National Weather Service and the equivalent level of the General Schedule that most closely approximates the duties of such positions.*
- (5) Of the positions identified under paragraph (4), the percentage of full-time equivalent contractors in those positions that have held a prior position at the National Weather Service or another entity in National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.*
- (6) The average full-time equivalent salary for Federal employees at the National Weather Service for each equivalent level of the General Schedule.*
- (7) The average salary for full-time equivalent contractors performing at each equivalent level of the General Schedule at the National Weather Service.*

The goal of this section is to hold the NWS accountable for the use of contractors instead of civil servants and to demonstrate that the use of contractors is more costly than hiring Federal employees. It will also require the NWS to be more forthcoming about the number of vacant positions in the NWS.

Section 413 of the Act, introduced by Senator Bill Nelson of Florida, authorizes NOAA to acquire backup capabilities for the two types of hurricane hunter aircraft that are operated by the NOAA Aircraft Operations Center, (which is presently moving from Ft. McDill in Tampa to Lakeland, Florida). This provision comes in the wake of an incident last year when the jet NOAA uses to gather hurricane measurements was forced to land for an emergency corrosion repair during a Hurricane Hermine reconnaissance mission. The Gulfstream G-IV was grounded for several days, forcing NOAA to scramble to find a temporary replacement. NWSEO represents the civilian crew members that fly on the NOAA planes, in addition to the ground crew who maintain them.

Here is a summary of other provisions of the Act that has been prepared by the Democratic staff of the Senate Commerce Committee:

#### **Title I. U.S. Weather Research and Forecasting Improvement.**

- Defines that NOAA weather research programs should prioritize the protection of life and property. This includes developing a technology transfer initiative and leveraging extramural research.
- Establishes a program to improve tornado warning.
- Protects and formally establishes the Hurricane Forecast Improvement Program
- Requires NOAA to develop a formal weather research plan.
- Requires NOAA to develop and maintain a prioritized list of observational needs for maintaining and improving our weather forecast products.
- Requires that before procuring observing systems or commercially provided data at a cost of more than \$500 million, NOAA must quantitatively assess the value of those purchases.
- Requires an annual report of NOAA computing capacity to run weather models.
- Defines an improved process to move research into application more efficiently.
- Authorizes NOAA to conduct outreach to stakeholders in the weather enterprise.

#### **Title II. Subseasonal and Forecasting Innovation**

- Requires NOAA to develop and disseminate meteorological forecasts on subseasonal (2 weeks-3 months), seasonal (3 months-1 year), and interannual (up to two years) timescales. Authorizes \$26.5 million.

### **Title III. Weather Satellite and Data Innovation**

- Requires NOAA to complete its COSMIC-1 and COSMIC-2 programs as scheduled; to integrate data from the Integrated Coastal and Ocean Observing System into weather models, and to contract with the National Academy of Sciences to complete a \$1 million independent study regarding likely future satellite needs.
- Requires NOAA to consider options to purchase commercially provided weather satellite data rather than to launch government satellites. Upon completion of a pilot project to purchase commercial weather data to assess its quality and reliability, and before developing any future governmental space system, require NOAA to consider whether existing or planned commercial capabilities are available. Authorize \$24 million total over 4 fiscal years (\$6 million each year) for completion of the pilot project. Still requires NOAA to meet international data sharing obligations.

### **Title IV. Federal Weather Coordination**

- Formally establishes the Environmental Information Services Working Group as a standing working group within the NOAA Science Advisory Board.
- Requires OSTP to coordinate relevant weather research and forecasting activities between federal agencies.
- Authorizes NOAA to establish an exchange program for up to 10 staff each year from the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research to be detailed to the National Weather Service.
- Authorizes a one year fellowship program at the National Centers for Environmental Prediction for postdoctoral fellows and academic researchers.
- Requires NOAA to designate at least warning coordination meteorologist at each weather forecast office to work specifically with emergency managers.
- Requires NOAA to assess and provide recommendations based in social and behavioral science to improve its watch and warning system.
- Authorizes NOAA to develop an award program for users of NOAA All Hazards Receivers to save lives and property.
- Requires NOAA to report on the impact of the Air Force's proposed divestiture in the U.S. Weather Research and Forecasting Model in favor of the European model.
- Authorizes the ongoing National Weather Service Operations and Workforce Analysis.
- Requires NOAA to report on contract positions.
- Requires NOAA to review the unique considerations of how urban environments influence weather patterns.

- Requires NOAA to acquire backup for the capabilities of the P-3 and G-IV hurricane hunter aircraft sufficient to prevent a single point of failure.
- Requires NOAA to complete a study on radar coverage gaps.

**Cantwell Amendment**

- Reauthorizes the Tsunami Warning, Education, and Research Act through 2021.

-NWSEO-

**No one cares more for National Weather Service employees than  
National Weather Service employees.**

**No one works harder for National Weather Service employees than  
National Weather Service employees.  
We are NWSEO.**