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## House Science Committee Democrats seek GAO Study on NWS Understaffing

(May 17, 2015) The Ranking Democrats of three Subcommittees of the House Science Committee have submitted a formal request to the Government Accountability Office to undertake a review of understaffing at the NWS and its impact on NWS employees. The May 8 request, sent by Representatives Dan Lipinski (IL), Suzanne Bonamici, (OR) and Don Beyer (VA), explains that:

“Although the NWS was fully funded in FY 2014, the number of vacant operational positions at Weather Forecast Offices and national forecasting centers continues to grow. According to reports that the NWS has provided to the National Weather Service Employees Organization, between September 2010 and February 2015 the number of non-supervisory, non-managerial employees at the NWS fell from 3877 to 3469. This is a 10% reduction in workforce that is predominately classified as ‘emergency essential.’”

The Representatives wrote that “it is troubling that this staff drawdown appears to be done randomly as positions become vacant, leaving staffing imbalances in Forecast Offices and River Forecast Centers across the country.” Representatives Lipinski, Bonamici and Beyer also explained that “we have concerns about the NWS intern program. . . .It appears that as many as 85 of the approximately 400 met intern positions are currently vacant. . . This 20% vacancy rate threatens the ability of the NWS to replace retiring forecasters in sufficient numbers.”

The three Members of Congress also wrote that “it is unclear why the NWS is reducing its operational staffing in this manner. The agency has attributed its staffing shortfall at various times to either underfunding, the inability of NOAA’s WFMO to process, advertise and fill vacancies in a timely and competent manner, or both. This former reason may not provide a satisfactory explanation for the increasing vacancy rate, as Congress has approved the agency’s budget request in full each year. Additionally, the NWS ended FY 2014 with approximately \$125 million in unspent carry over funding.”

**The letter requested that the GAO investigate the following questions:**

*Does the NWS today have sufficient operational staffing to ensure timely and accurate forecasts and warnings?*

*Are higher graded employees being assigned to perform lower-graded work (such as managers routinely working forecasting shifts or forecasters conducting upper air observations) because of vacancies in lower graded positions?*

*Are the scheduling practices that have been put into place to ensure shift coverage jeopardizing employee health, safety, productivity or taking leave?*

*Is the NWS recruiting an adequate number of met interns to ensure it has a sufficient number of forecasters in the future?*

“I am very appreciative of these key members of the Science Committee who understand the challenges we face as NWS employees,” said NWSEO President Dan Sobien. “Dan Lipinski and Suzanne Bonamici have been great supporters of NWS employees and friends of NWSEO for years. We are grateful, as always, for their support. Don Beyer is new to Congress this year, and we are very pleased that he has taken such an immediate interest in the NWS and its employees.”

-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.**