

Dear Senator Alexander,

My name is Scott McNeil and I am the National Weather Service Employees Organization branch steward for the National Weather Service Forecast in Memphis, TN. Our 24/7 office is comprised of 21 dedicated folks that ensure residents of the Mid-South receive lifesaving weather information. We serve over 2.5 million residents of the Mid-South including parts of Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi and Missouri.

The government shutdown is impacting our ability to do our jobs. First there is the short-term problem of coping with a subpar forecast model. The GFS weather model is the backbone of the weather infrastructure in the United States. A lot of products are based on this model and it usually provides a starting point for our forecast. Since the start of the government shutdown 99% of the staff at the Environmental Modeling Center near Washington D.C. have been furloughed. There have been problems with the data assimilation for the GFS model since the beginning of the shutdown and there is nobody there to fix. As a result, the model has been terribly inconsistent. We are relying on a weather model produced in Europe to produce the forecast for the Mid-South! This seems like a national security risk.

This is the time of year that our office starts to prepare for the upcoming severe weather season. However, during the shutdown, we are not allowed to do certain non-expected activities. There are over a dozen meetings to train severe weather spotters around the Mid-South that are scheduled but cannot be performed. We cannot meet with partners to plan for the upcoming severe weather season. We usually have several meetings with emergency managers to learn about their capabilities and needs while training them on NWS procedures. These are not happening. School safety talks are an important part of training kids, teachers and administrators on what to do in case of severe weather. These are also not happening. The Storm Ready program helps counties and cities make sure they are ready to handle severe weather. These activities are on hold.

The weather infrastructure of this country is complex and interwoven between different agencies and levels of government (local, state, federal). This shutdown is severely hampering the entire system at all levels from the weather models to long term severe weather planning with our partners. It is not an understatement to say lives could be lost this upcoming severe weather season that could have been prevented.

On a different note there is the human impact here at our office. We have now missed a full paycheck. Several of employees rely on this job as their only source of income. Several young people are just getting started and cannot afford to miss a paycheck. The stress is growing and morale is suffering which makes it harder to perform at our best under what are often already stressful conditions.

This government shutdown is creating a lot of unnecessary stress and placing the public at risk. Please end the shutdown and open the government of the United States.

With Regard,

Scott McNeil

NWSEO Branch 2-02 Steward

Memphis, TN