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May 9, 2013

The Honorable Dr. Rebecca Blank  
Deputy Secretary of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave., NW  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dr. Kathryn Sullivan  
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for  
Oceans and Atmosphere & Acting NOAA  
Administrator  
1401 Constitution Ave, NW - Room 5128  
Washington, DC 20230

*"You can furlough Federal employees, but you can't furlough the weather."*

Dear Drs. Blank and Sullivan:

I write to strongly urge you to consider reprogramming National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) funds towards National Weather Service (NWS) Operations and Research accounts and reject the proposed furloughs that will have negative impacts on employees and readiness. Furthermore, I respectfully ask your agency leadership to do right for the working men and women who are stretched far too thin due to chronic understaffing at the NWS.

**FURLOUGHES:**

It is my understanding that there are other funds available to cover these furloughs through reprogramming (which has been encouraged by both Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Fattah of the House CJS Appropriations Subcommittee). While I am also supportive of NOAA grants and research dollars that promote economic development across this country, the reversing the cuts to the National Weather Service deserve priority to mitigate adverse impacts to the safety and protection of the American people.

As you may know, the National Weather Service maintains a collective bargaining agreement with the National Weather Service Employees Organization, whose 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," 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. However, employees who are in a furlough status cannot, by law, be called into work on a day designated for furlough. In short, the minimal savings from these furloughs would be accomplished via the "meat-ax" approach that I have repeatedly opposed as poor public policy.

**EXISTING STAFFING SHORTAGES:**

Furthermore, on top of the proposed furloughs, forecast offices around the country already have serious staffing shortages. The National Weather Service has seen a 6% cut in staffing since 2010. There is now a hiring freeze, and the Department of Commerce has proposed additional permanent staffing reductions as part of its FY 14 budget request that would result in a cumulative 8% reduction. These

staffing decisions are having a significant effect nationally, but there is also a very specific effect on my constituents in the 8<sup>th</sup> district of Minnesota, who are protected by a National Weather Service office in Duluth, MN.

Duluth has the world's largest inland seaport along with the largest fire weather area east of the Mississippi River. The National Weather Service forecast office also has 50,000 square miles of responsibility to protect life and property. Duluth's forecast office has 5 terminal area forecast points for aircraft and their airports. Original staffing for the forecast office included 15 operational staff members with has been understaffed for its entire 17 year history.

I have continued to fight against the sequestration cuts, but until we find a broader solution, let's work to make sure our Federal agencies operate as effectively as possible. I look forward to your response to articulate your agency's justifications to these concerns I have outlined above.

Please do not hesitate to contact Mark Privratsky in my Duluth field office with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard M. Nolan". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Richard M. Nolan  
Member of Congress

CC: Dr. Louis W. Uccellini - NOAA Assistant Administrator for Weather Services and Director,  
National Weather Service