

## Message from NWSEO General Counsel

May 15, 2018

Dear NWSEO Alaska Region Members:

I am writing to share important news about NWSEO's recent efforts to protect the jobs of NWS employees in Alaska. NWSEO Regional Chair Jim Brader has been here in Washington for the past week working with me to protect NWS jobs and public services, both legally and legislatively.

Last Thursday, Jim was the union's chief witness at an arbitration case that challenges the NWS's unilateral reduction in the hours of operations at eight Alaska Region WSOs – which has resulted in both a loss of upper air fights as well as overtime opportunities for our met techs. In 2011, Jim negotiated a memorandum of understanding with management in which it promised to permanently maintain 16 x 7 operations at five WSOs: McGrath, Cold Bay, Yakutat, St Paul and Annette Island. At the hearing, the NWS did not deny that it breached this agreement- rather their DOC lawyer argued that it was simply invalid and that the NWS was not bound to abide by it. In so doing, they have essentially conceded that the NWS cannot be trusted when they agree to something at the bargaining table. (Remember how they supposedly “terminated” our CBA last year? And that another arbitrator ruled that they had no right to do so?) NWSEO also argued to the arbitrator that while the NWS had not contractually committed itself to maintain 16 x 7 operations at the other WSOs, they violated the CBA by failing to conduct LOT meetings and complete bargaining over the impact of the reduction in hours and loss of overtime before cutting hours at these offices.

While he was here, Jim also arranged appointments for the two of us to meet with the staff of Senator Sullivan and Congressman Young to discuss the impact that the high vacancy rate in the Alaska Region (double the national NWS average) is having on both the public and the staff – such as the forfeiture of annual leave. Jim also enthusiastically argued that the WSOs should remain open every day and staffed by two met techs even after the autolaunchers are installed so that they can provide other services to the local communities as they once did.

Last week I also had the opportunity to meet with Jim to strategize over other ongoing negotiations in the Alaska Region.

Very truly yours,

Richard J. Hirn  
General Counsel and Legislative Director  
National Weather Service Employees Organization