



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

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NWSEO Lobbying Efforts Produce Results For Cash Starved NWS

The House Appropriations Committee has approved an additional \$7 million to fund NWS staffing as a result of lobbying by NWSEO. On Wednesday, the Committee approved an additional \$7 million above the President's request for the NWS budget for Fiscal Year 2009, which begins on October 1. The Committee's Report states that "the increase is provided solely for [the] Local Warnings and Forecasts [line item] and reflects the Committee's concern with regard to the chronic shortage of salaries and expenses funds within the NWS."

NWSEO's General Counsel and Legislative Director submitted testimony to the House Appropriations Commerce, Justice and Science Subcommittee earlier this year, warning that "the ability of the NWS to respond to severe weather is in immediate jeopardy due to chronic underfunding, which has left the NWS at least \$50 million short of what it needs to do its mission. Underfunding has left NWS operations on thin ice – and that ice is melting." He also met privately with senior staff of the Subcommittee prior to the Subcommittee's hearing on the Administration '09 NOAA budget request and provided detailed information on the vacancy rates within the NWS as well as internal NWS documents that identified initiatives that will go unfunded as a result of the Administration's inadequate funding request for the NWS. At the hearing, the first question that Subcommittee Chair Mollohan asked Admiral Lautenbacher was about understaffing and vacancy rates at the NWS.

The funding increase approved by the Appropriations Committee will still require approval by the full House of Representatives, which is likely. However, the Senate's version of the NWS funding bill does not contain the extra \$7 million approved by the House Appropriations Committee. Whether the NWS will ultimately receive the additional funds will be decided later this year by a House-Senate Conference Committee, made up of the Chairs and Ranking Republican Members of both the House and Senate Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Committee.

Regardless of whether the additional \$ 7 million is approved by the Conference Committee, the NWS will likely receive a significant increase in funding this coming year as a result of other efforts by NWSEO. Last year, the House and Senate Appropriations Committee reduced the NWS appropriations by \$14 million to pay for weather-related "earmarks" that went to universities and other recipients outside of the agency. In January, NWSEO's lobbyist met with the senior members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee staff, as well as the Chief of Staff to Subcommittee Chair Sen. Mikulski, to urge that Congress not pay for weather-related earmarks from NWS base funding this coming year. As a result, both the Senate and the House have approved additional funds, over and above the amounts requested by the Administration for funding the NWS, to cover the cost of weather-related earmarks in the coming fiscal year. This alone will essentially result in an extra \$14 million funding for the NWS in the coming year in comparison to the current year.

NWSEO's political action committee continues to financially support the re-election campaigns of Chairs of both the House and Senate Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Subcommittees, Sen. Mikulski (D-MD) and Rep. Mollohan (D-WV). In addition, NWSEO's PAC is also providing financial support to the re-election campaign of the Ranking Republican on the House Appropriations Subcommittee, Rep. Peter Frelinghuysen (R -NJ). The political action committee is a separate segregated fund into which NWSEO's members contribute that is used to support the re-election of those in Congress who have shown support for the NWS and NWSEO's objectives.