



NWS Excuses for Hiring Freeze in light of \$125 million Surplus Don't Add Up

(January 24, 2014) Evidence of a \$125 million dollar surplus in fiscal year 2013 has the National Weather Service scrambling for excuses for why they didn't seek permission from Congress to reprogram the money and avert an unnecessary and dangerous hiring freeze. Currently there are 451 vacancies agency-wide.

In response to information learned at the January Hiring Freeze arbitration and communicated by NWSEO, the NWS claims they *"did not receive allotments for the final FY13 NOAA Spend Plan, which included over \$20M in additional Local Warnings and Forecasts (LWF) funding, until the end of August, when funds in the spend plan targeted for planned hires could no longer be executed."* The fiscal year 2013 ended on September 30, 2013.

This response only serves to generate more questions that NWSEO would like answered:

What "funds in the spend plan targeted for planned hires"? Where is that money now?
Why didn't they then lift the freeze at the end of August?

The NWS knew the funds had been appropriated, so why didn't they begin recruitment process? Just because it couldn't be "executed" by the end of the fiscal year (September 30) doesn't mean that recruitment shouldn't have begun.

The NWS also says a *"critical but often overlooked aspect of the carryover is that FY13 had less active severe weather and hurricane seasons. This resulted in high unobligated overtime, premium pay and emergency travel balances."*

The "unobligated overtime, premium pay and emergency travel balances" are all LWF money. Money the Agency originally claimed was completely spent. Why didn't they start using this money at the end of FY 13 to end the hiring freeze?

NWSEO maintains that the NWS could have asked Congress to reprogram the funds to enable them to fill vacancies of critical positions. Below, you will read (in italics) NWS's reasons for not requesting a reprogramming, followed by the union's rebuttal – stating firmly that for the mission of saving lives and property, the critical positions should have been filled.

The NWS says, *"No. The NOAA Spend Plan, which constituted all requested reprogrammings for NOAA was submitted in May, approved in July and allotted in August. NWS could not submit yet*

a new reprogramming proposal while the current proposal was being reviewed."

NWSEO believes the Agency's response is simply is not true. The NWS did submit a new reprogramming request to Congress to avoid furloughs after submission of the spend plan and while it was waiting for approval.

The NWS says, "Further, NWS justifies to Congress, and they approve, how much each PPA receives. Some of these PPAs, including the Sandy Supplemental, have specific objectives related to observing, processing, and dissemination infrastructure in support of the NWS's mission critical service delivery. Reprogramming funds from these objectives for filling vacancies would permanently degrade NWS' ability to operate and maintain its forecast process independent of staffing levels."

NWSEO wants you to know, that the fact of the matter is, that the NWS DID NOT spend the \$125 million initially appropriated for these other "objectives" (that's why there is \$125 million unspent) so the NWS can't say that had they reprogrammed these funds they would have degraded other NWS capacities. That statement is only true if they actually had spent the \$125 million on those "objectives." And although some Sandy money was designated in the Supplemental for certain specific purposes that would not include labor, \$25 million was just to "improve forecasting capabilities." The NWS explained at the hearing the big cost associated with hiring is allegedly a non-recurring, one time only expense - the \$100,000 PCS cost. To say that they can't use those funds for recurring expenses like increased labor costs if they hired someone, doesn't hold water.

NWS also says, "Finally, by the time any such reprogramming could be approved, NWS would not have time during the remainder of the fiscal year, given NOAA's 80 day hiring model, to successfully fill many staffing vacancies."

The NWS could have started process and positions would have been filed by now!

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-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.