

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 23, 2019

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

We are writing to express our concern that the current shutdown is having a significant negative impact on the National Weather Service (NWS), putting our national security and life and property at risk and potentially damaging many sectors of our economy. Countless businesses, local news stations and millions of Americans depend on scientific forecasting from NWS in their daily lives. Disrupting its work will have immediate and lasting consequences for all of them, and blame for that breakdown will not be limited to any one leader or political party.

Of the 4,200 employees at NWS, more than 3,600 are currently working without pay, 24 hours a day and every day of the week, to keep all 325 million of our fellow Americans informed and safe. Although they continue to provide forecasts and warnings of impending weather, they have been directed to cease other critical, ostensibly “non-essential” services to their communities such as emergency preparedness with local emergency managers, “storm spotter” classes, media workshops and community outreach on social media.

Similarly, the National Hurricane Center has cancelled annual preparedness training for emergency managers from Gulf Coast and East Coast communities, leaving those communities exposed and at risk in the event of a disaster. These cancelled classes cannot be made up before this year’s hurricane season.

Hurricane Center staff are not being permitted to utilize this off-season to continue research or improve hurricane forecasting models and techniques. NOAA’s Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory in Miami, where critical hurricane research is conducted, is closed. Of the 50 employees at NWS’s Environmental Modeling Center, all but one have been furloughed, which will result in a delay in the launch of the next-generation global forecasting system planned for later this year, the Finite Volume Cubed-Sphere (FV3), which would be the most significant upgrade to NWS’s the global forecast model since 1980. NWS staff have reported that the reliability of their existing, outdated global forecast model has deteriorated during the shutdown because there is no one present to maintain it.


Several hundred NWS forecasters rely on the annual American Meteorological Society meeting in January to share research findings between NWS, other NOAA offices, and with private and academic meteorological communities. Despite this being an important bridge between “research to operations,” the participation of all NOAA employees at this five day meeting, held earlier this month in Phoenix, was cancelled.


Every community that your supporters call home depends on America’s NWS to keep them safe, healthy and ready. The shutdown at NWS could even lead to the degradation of life-saving

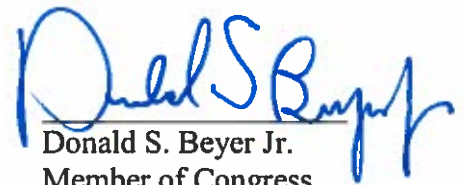
services. NWS was already suffering from a critical staffing shortage, despite full funding from Congress. GAO released a study several months into your presidency that revealed the NWS operational unit vacancy rate had reached a point where NWS employees were “unable at times to perform key tasks” and that that NWS “staff experienced stress, fatigue and reduced morale resulting from their efforts to cover for vacancies.” Last year was the first year in which the NWS was able to hire as many employees as retired. This shutdown has effectively imposed a hiring freeze, from which the agency will not be able to easily recover after the agency fully reopens. This will further exacerbate staff shortages at forecasting offices across the country, and will result in a long term reduction in the timeliness, reliability and quality of NWS forecasts and warnings.


We remain deeply concerned that this shutdown is undermining the ability of dedicated public servants to deliver necessary lifesaving services and may permanently compromise the ability of the agency to do this work. Equally concerning is the effect this may have on the workforce for many years to come. Without its indispensable workforce, NWS would be unable to fulfill its critical mission. We urge you to end this shutdown and allow NWS to return to its important work.

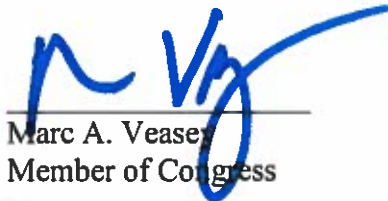
Sincerely,


Paul Tonko
Member of Congress


Eddie Bernice Johnson
Member of Congress

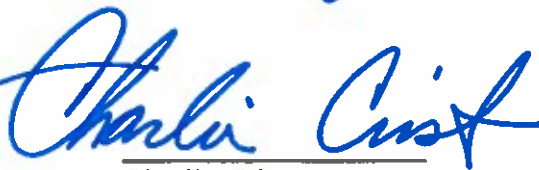

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