



National Weather Service  
Employees Organization

## **NWS Director Dr. Louis Uccellini Speaks at the NWSEO 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention (including Dr. Uccellini's Q & A Session with NWSEO members)**

(September 26, 2015) The National Weather Service Director Dr. Uccellini addressed the NWSEO Convention. Dr. Uccellini thanked NWSEO for inviting him to the annual convention. He thanked the NWSEO leadership for their time, commitment and dedication to represent the NWS bargaining unit employees. Dr. Uccellini recognized that our labor management relationship is under a lot of stress. He does believe we need to work together in a collaborative manner. He talked about past partnerships with NWSEO and accomplishments made through synergy teams. He also talked about the strong support for the NWS from both the Congress and Senate.

Dr. Uccellini spoke about the dedication of the National Weather Service employees and thanked members for their participation in the recent Organization Health Index (OHI) survey. Results of this survey show the dedication you have for your life's work is "off the charts."

Dr. Uccellini also recognized that the workforce analysis data shows that "today's challenge is employees' lack of trust in senior management at the local, regional and especially national levels" of the NWS. He recognized the disconnect between NWS HQ and the field. Dr. Uccellini believes that some of this started in 2011 from the NWS fiscal mismanagement. He said that the lack of transparency and communication compounded this distrust (even amongst the leadership team) and noted that management needs to be more inclusive.

The NWS Director said the leadership has listened to NWS employees by improving:

- Bandwidth Improvements for 121 out of 122 WFOs
- Travel funds
- Training (funding increased from \$880,000 to \$7,000,000/yr today)
- Vacancies – Dr. Uccellini said the NWS is listening and making progress but not enough to satisfy him or NWSEO. There are weaknesses in the hiring process and hired a new WFMO Director has been hired.

Dr. Uccellini talked about his hopes to work towards better collaboration. He expressed an understanding of the high number of vacancies as a top concern. He also recognized the lack of money and time for professional development and stated that he is making professional development is a top priority.

Dr. Uccellini also spoke about the National Academy of Science report "Second to None" and the National Academy of Public Administration report "Forecasting For the Future: Assuring the Capacity of the National Weather Service." He said the reports questioned the staffing profile across the current field structure, and clearly pointed to the need for change. But there was no agreement on what to change, how to change, and how fast to change. As successful as the MAR was, Uccellini says the NWS

cannot do business the same way it did 20 years ago. Dr. Uccellini said that implementing solutions will take time. He told the convention that the path to Organization Workforce Analysis was not set in stone. He stated, "No plans to restructure or downsize the NWS" and said the OWA is an ongoing analysis.

The OHI survey also reaffirmed a poor view of NWS leadership and said there are clear disconnects and a lack of trust between management and those of you working in the field. He recognized that the NWS leadership has to do a better job communicating - not just from the top down, but from the bottom up and across the organization.

Dr. Uccellini also said that he sees an increasing value in WFOs, RFCs, CWSUs and NCEP Services Centers serving as service outlets for all of NOAA, further strengthening the value of and need for our services. The NWS Director said, "As we move into the future, we need to create a more flexible organization, better equipped to serve decision makers when extreme atmospheric, land, ocean, ice, and even space weather events threaten our nation. But the truth is, the future is not crystal clear. We have a roadmap and a direction, but the picture of the exact end state is not clear because we have not invented it yet, even as we evolve while embracing IDSS. This is an uncomfortable position to be in. Instead of concrete answers, what we have are interests and outcomes we want to achieve."

Dr. Uccellini finished by saying there are many strategic opportunities embedded in this call for a more collaborative approach between management and NWSEO. He stated, "I am committed to working with you, with NWSEO, to create our desired future together, to serve the most dedicated workforce in any government organization, and to make the NWS second to none."

### **Dr. Uccellini's Question and Answer Session with Membership**

The speech was followed by a Question and Answer session. Dr. Uccellini stayed for more than an hour fielding tough questions from NWSEO members.

Bill Hopkins asked Louis directly if there were plans to downsize the NWS workforce or close offices. Louis paused, then replied, "There are no plans to restructure or downsize the National Weather Service. [sic] I do not have a file, I do not have a piece of paper that says what the end state will look like."

In response to the question of what NWSEO management can do to improve relations with agency management, Louis deferred in favor of turning it back on the agency, "We in the management realm have to take a step up in terms of inclusiveness."

NWSEO President Dan Sobien asked Dr. Uccellini why the National Weather Service felt compelled to drop the employee Health Club and Wellness Program. Dan Sobien cited the elaborate fitness center at NCEP as a positive benefit to employees at that facility and noted that the Health and Wellness Program was an important benefit to all employees. Dr. Uccellini told the men that the decision to remove this benefit was out of his hands.

In response to a question about the constant battle to keep ITOs in WFOs, "We are working a modified approach currently through the executive branch" to find a longer-term solution to the ITO problem, but "if it does pass in its current form on the Hill, then we have to do what the law requires."

There was much discussion regarding NWS understaff ongoing vacancy problems in the NWS. Louis says that, "The hiring process is broken, clearly, and we need to get it back on track." NWSEO Pacific Region Chair Chris Jacobson noted that there are currently more than 500 positions vacant. Dr. Uccellini disagreed, stating there are fewer than 300 appropriated vacancies and noted that NWSEO should not assume that all FTEs in field offices are appropriated. "The appropriations law trumps everything. With regards to all of these other things, that's all I can say." NWSEO General Counsel Richard Hirn informed the group that there is no cap on FTEs in the law and that an agency can hire as many FTEs as they can fund. The important issue is that the number of vacant positions that were previously filled is approaching 600.

There was a discussion involving both Dr. Uccellini and NOAA Chief of Staff Renee Stone regarding the barrage of requests by management for non-disclosure agreements in NWSEO discussions. Essentially NOAA/NWS feel that they need these agreements because they can't risk speaking candidly with NWSEO and then having their statements leaked in the press. NWSEO leadership cannot and will not sign those agreements because of their inherent obligation to share information with their members.