



# The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

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## Subcommittee Examines FY09 NOAA Budget; Releases GAO Report on Effectiveness of U.S. Aviation Weather Services

Last year, the House Science Committee asked the GAO to conduct an investigation of the FAA's plans to contract our CWSUs. On Tuesday, February 26, the House Science Committee held a hearing on the Administration's FY 08 NOAA-NWS budget request, as well as on the results of GAO's investigation. The Subcommittee Chairman, Nick Lampson, will be the Guest Speaker at NWSEO's 2008 National Convention, which will be held in Houston on October 11-12. The Committee issued a press release following the hearing. It appears below:

(Washington, DC) Today, the **U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology's Subcommittee on Energy and Environment** examined the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration \(NOAA\) FY 2009 budget proposal](#). The Committee also released [a report at the hearing from the Government Accountability Office \(GAO\)](#) regarding Aviation Weather Services.

NOAA oversees U.S. weather forecasting, climate prediction, management of fisheries and coastal and ocean resources. The agency is responsible for mapping and charting U.S. coastal areas and providing other navigation and support services and conducting research to support its work on the oceans and atmosphere. The FY 2009 request calls for \$4.2 billion for the agency – which is 4.8% above the FY 2008 enacted funding.

"There are some encouraging features of the FY 2009 budget request for NOAA. For the first time in years, the President has requested an increase for the Agency over the current year's funding level. We are pleased to see additional funds requested to restore some climate sensors and to upgrade a variety of models, technology and software systems. However, I believe the Administration's budget proposal still lacks the level of funding needed for this agency to truly fulfill all of its diverse missions," said **Energy and Environment Subcommittee Chairman Nick Lampson (D-TX)**.

Chairman Lampson underscored the Committee's continued interest in procurements for the new polar and geostationary weather satellite systems. The Chairman commended NOAA for implementing recommendations made by GAO to obtain more robust cost estimates for the new GOES-R system. He also noted continued concerns about schedule and technical problems with a key sensor for the NPOESS satellite program; as well as the need for a follow-on operational instrument to replace NASA's QUIKscat satellite; and for a plan for follow on missions for the climate instruments that were eliminated from the NPOESS program.

"The need for satellite-based measurement is growing, but the budgets are not expanding to provide the additional funds necessary to accommodate these needs," he added.

Today, the Committee also released a report compiled by the GAO entitled ***Aviation Weather: FAA Is Reevaluating Services at Key Centers; Both FAA and the National Weather Service Need to Better Ensure Product Quality.***

In 2007, several Members of the Committee asked the GAO to evaluate the progress FAA and NWS were making toward restructuring the delivery of aviation weather services. This process began in 2005 with FAA's request that NWS restructure its aviation weather services to consolidate offices, provide remote services, and reduce the annual cost of providing services by \$2 million. The GAO completed its review in December and reported on its findings today.

Noted **Lampson**, "We all know and have personally experienced flight delays and cancellations due to inclement weather. They are an all too common occurrence. But there is more than convenience at stake here. There is also a question of safety. Severe storms or rapidly changing conditions can create serious risks for aircraft. These two agencies should be working together cooperatively to ensure the smooth, safe flow of air traffic in our nation. We want to ensure that as FAA and NWS evaluate the aviation weather forecasting program, they keep these essential goals in mind."

GAO found that neither agency currently assures nor controls weather products and services produced at their centers. Essentially, GAO told the Committee today that NWS cannot demonstrate the quality of value of its services, and FAA cannot ensure the quality of the services it funds. As the report notes, "Until both agencies are able to measure and ensure the quality of the aviation weather products at the en route centers, FAA may not be getting the information it needs to effectively manage air traffic."

"Any restructuring of aviation weather forecasting services must be done in a manner that will ensure at a minimum there is no degradation in these services going forward. There are no cost savings or efficiencies to be found by reducing the safety of air travel for the public. I believe the agencies are now moving in the right direction. FAA and NWS should continue to work together to implement a high quality aviation weather forecast system that ensures safe, convenient air travel for the public," concluded **Lampson**.

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