



The Four Winds

National Weather Service Employees Organization

August 2006

A Candid Conversation Between Eversole and Sobien

On August 21, 2006, NWSEO Southern Region Chair Dave Eversole was having a discussion with NWSEO President Dan Sobien about the new ConOps, sometimes referred to as the clustered peer plan. Early in the discussion it was mentioned that it was too bad everyone could not hear this call. So, the call was recorded, transcribed, and posted below with only minor editing for the sake of readability.

Eversole: Two emails have been sent out to everyone by Gen. Johnson. The first talked about ConOps, and the second talked about how he felt he needed to do a better job with communications skills.

Sobien: You're asking about the all hands email from General Johnson entitled "ConOps and Our Future", and I just challenge everyone to be careful on how they read it because the words, all of the words, in that were very carefully chosen. For instance, if you look under the Guiding Principles section, it states "we are absolutely committed to 24 by 7 by 365 services. We honor this commitment in today's National Weather Service by 24 by 7 by 365 staffing." So they're saying they're doing this today with staffing, and they'll do it in the future with services. But they're not saying they'll do it in the future with staffing. And therefore you really don't know where those services are coming from. So, it's very, very carefully worded and people need to read it very, very carefully to see what they're saying here. As far as the overall ConOps, we're not resistant to change, and we certainly want to hear their ideas and appreciate them. We appreciate working with them and to help us be a part of the process, but at the same time we're not completely on board with this process, and in fact we're kind of lukewarm to the whole thing so far.

Eversole: What is it about ConOps that you like?

Sobien: I understand that in the future, just like in the last 10 years, technology has changed dramatically, just absolutely dramatically in my career, and in the next 10 years I expect it to change as dramatically or more dramatically, and I totally and completely understand the fact that the NWS must change to keep up with that new technology and to continue to be a relevant, important factor, the relevant factor that we are today. I like the fact that we are looking at new ways of doing things and perhaps even better ways of doing things. Certainly, one option as time goes on, it seems that communications capabilities are getting better and better and better,

that it only makes sense for the NWS to utilize these improved communications to have a better collaborative forecast process. So, I do like that aspect of it.

Eversole: What kind of things about ConOps are you concerned about?

Sobien: There are many things that I'm concerned about. The one thing is that the ConOps plan that I see being proposed really isn't a ConOps plan, it's more of a work force management plan. Essentially, it's just a way to do the job with less people in the future. I see no mention of new products and services that the NWS will be doing except in the most vague terms, I see no tying of this ConOps to specific new technology like phased array radar, dual polarization radar, new computing technology. I think one thing we really have to get into in the future is to have local modeling capabilities so that forecasters can play what-if games with approaching squall lines. I think that the whole TacMet idea that came out of Southern Region is a very good idea, and Eastern Region has plans to concentrate on the short term parts of the forecast which I'm very curious to see how that comes along. It could be a way for us to go in the future. What I'm seeing from this Cluster Peer ConOps though is just a way to offload your products which doesn't include any new ideas it just shows a way to offload products so that the job can be done with fewer people. They're talking about and as D.L. Johnson mentioned in his email, they're talking about being able to close some offices at night by 2015. If the agency is going to make a commitment to the short term, for being there for a train derailment, for making sure that if a thunderstorm pops up in the middle of the night that we're there for the high impact events, for the life and death decisions, the possibility of us not being there and fully staffed just doesn't make sense. Like I said in the Government Exec magazine, you just don't close down the fire station at night.

Eversole: How is NWSEO involved in the ConOps Plan? We're you invited to participate in discussion over this?

Sobien: Yes, we have and I thank the NWS management. Originally, the ConOps ideas that were being batted around the country, for instance, the Nested Office Concept that was very popular about a year ago, we had no input. When we started to complain about it, the NWS brought NWSEO into the picture, and we were given a seat on each of these teams. Now, we were given just one seat out of twelve or thirteen people, and in none of the teams were we given a majority vote. The chairman on these teams was never the NWSEO, and the chairman always held a 51 percent vote. So, on a lot of the issues where we objected, we were just given a little minority statement that went along with the total report saying that NWSEO objects to doing that. Those objections seem to have fallen away and nobody seems to know where they're at. We've been given an opportunity to voice our objections. We're hearing where things are really out in the open, but our objections, I feel, aren't being listened to, and that's where we're going to run into a problem down the road.

Eversole: That really doesn't make sense that they would invite you into a discussion over this and not listen to the representative of the workforce.

Sobien: We were listened to. I don't think that anybody would argue that we weren't given an opportunity to voice our objections as members of those teams. I guess my objection is that in

many cases, we were one out of nine voices, or one out of ten voices, and if the other eight or nine people said no, we don't agree with you, our voice was lost. We were given a little report that said one person, or the NWSEO, didn't agree. For instance, with 24-7 staffing, that came up on the original ConOps team and I was on that team. I voiced an objection to the fact that they were developing a plan where you didn't need 24-7 staffing, and it was written up as a minority report that the NWSEO disagreed with that. Now when everybody's sitting in their office and are reading these plans, the minority reports aren't showing up. All they're seeing is that yeah, we're developing this plan, but they're not seeing that NWSEO had objections to it. So, I'm a little concerned about that, but I'm more concerned with the fact that the NWS is perhaps thinking that we're agreeing to this, when right now we're not, but although we're very appreciative of being a part of the process and knowing what's going on. And I feel that there's no big conspiracy or anything like that, but the fact of the matter is that at some point down the road, we're going to be in a train wreck, and I really hope that they see it coming as much as I do.

Eversole: When I read the last two letters sent that were sent out by General Johnson addressing the ConOps subject, it implies that NWSEO is on board with the entire ConOps program, but you're telling me that you tried to tell them, but somehow it got lost, your concerns were lost in the communication flow.

Sobien: Again, I think you have to read the things they're writing very carefully because they're written by a team of people, signed by D.L. Johnson, but they are written by a team of people, and then after that, they're gone over by a team of people who's job it is to make sure they're conveying the message they want to convey. So, every word on those things needs to be read very carefully. Just because they put the ConOps team and the NWSEO in the same sentence, that doesn't necessarily mean that the ConOps team and NWSEO are on the same page.

Eversole: That's what I was worried about, because that first email sent out by General Johnson gave a very strong indication that NWSEO was completely on board with ConOps which is what concerned a lot of people. They were concerned with what's going to happen to their job, and the letter made it seem like NWSEO has signed off completely on this.

Sobien: Let me repeat what I said before, these emails are written by a team of people and then massaged by professionals, by communication professionals, and just because they mentioned the Corporate Board, the ConOps team and NWSEO in the same sentence doesn't necessarily mean we always agreed.

Eversole: We've already talked about what you like about ConOps, and we've talked about your concerns.

Sobien: We don't support closing an office at night under anything except for maybe under the most extreme circumstances. You know, if communications are just completely out and there is no power or they had to evacuate an area, perhaps under those circumstances, but any time that an office could be there at night, we want it open. We see no plan in this ConOps plan for any kind of infusion of new products and services, only the very vaguest that new products and services will be done. We've seen no plan for the infusion of new science and technology. We are not on board with the idea of a dynamic staffing model which we'll be hearing about quite a

bit over the next few months. We believe that every office needs to be staffed sufficiently so that you can run at least two people per shift 24 hours per day; in addition to that there are probably extra duties that need extra shifts. We want to see commitments from the NWS to get us more involved in the whole TacMet idea that came out of Southern Region. We want to see commitments from the NWS to be better providers for future environmental forecasts and services. We understand that our jobs are going to be different in 2015, but we want to make sure that we're still relevant and have jobs. The fact that they're promising people a job to people who want a job, I want them to promise that the positions will be there so that people have jobs, but they have opportunities for advancement in their career, in their chosen career of meteorology, and not, say, for instance marine biology. The other thing is that it's very interesting that the GAO did a study of this whole idea. The GAO reported that they wanted to know what the implications of the ConOps are for the staffing, budget and forecasting services that we provide before the NWS spends any more money on this plan. We want to know that, too. We also want to know that before any more money is spent on this. The GAO asked about the metrics for evaluation, and what's the mechanism for feedback. Under the modernization, the NWS went to great lengths to have evaluation methods and feedback methods, and this time none of that is occurring. One thing that every time I hear it just makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up is they talk about being able to just turn off the phones and forward them to another office so that an emergency manager in Paducah, Kentucky might actually be talking to a meteorologist at an office in Ohio somewhere instead of Kentucky. If they're telling me that's not a degradation of service, I just don't know what is. The other thing is that I don't believe that the NWS has made the case for change. I don't believe anybody in the leadership of the NWSEO believes what the corporate board believes, and that is that the NWS is fundamentally flawed. I think we are probably the best government agency, perhaps in the world. We function great. That's a testament to not only all of us who do the job every day, but our management too. We are a very good agency. They're saying that we need to change that agency. Now, I do understand that we need to figure out a way to infuse new technology and to make sure that we have the funding for the new technology and I understand that we have to stay flexible to be able to do new products and do things new ways, but I still have not seen this case for change for some huge change in our concept of operations. They still have a little selling to do. Our budgets are better than they've ever been, so the argument that we don't have the money, my argument goes back that if we don't have the money, it's their job to get us the money. Personally, I think we have the money.

Eversole: I remember when they first came out with the Nested Office concept. Everybody in the NWS was very concerned about just what was going to happen to the NWS, what was going to happen to our careers, how was public service going to be affected. Was NWSEO able to do anything to stop the Nested Office concept from occurring?

Sobien: Yes at least for the time being. I hope that we spoke and people heard that that was a bad idea. I fear that there are some who support this new clustered peer approach that see this as the opening of the door that will some day allow them to consolidate services to a few offices. For instance, I hear talk that some locations, perhaps large metropolitan areas, are to be staffed with more people than where we have a WFO in a small town. It makes sense to an extent that the large metropolitan area is providing more services than the smaller town, but I believe what they're talking about is that now for instance at night, the larger offices would be able to take

over the services of the smaller offices. That's just the first step to just eventually having the larger offices do all the forecasts for the smaller offices. It's worrisome. They use terms such as cluster support offices. They're very open-ended about what a cluster support office is. Therefore, at least in some people minds, not in everybody who is devising this, at least in some people minds, they think this is opening the door to consolidate services and effectively give us a nested office type of program.

Eversole: It sounds to me like that's exactly where they're trying to head. They were unable to succeed with the Nested Office Concept because NWSEO was able to get language introduced into the budget bill so that no money could be spent on consolidation of offices. It sounds like this ConOps program is headed in the same direction, would you agree?

Sobien: They have never mislead me before, they meaning the leadership level management of the NWS, so I will take them at their word, but I believe it was Ronald Reagan that came up with the trust but verify term, that's been our approach so far. It doesn't take a Rhodes Scholar to see how this new concept could be manipulated very easily to turn into maybe not exactly the Nested Office Concept but certainly a consolidated forecasting system, and all it would take is for someone three, four, five years from now to say our budgets are really bad, we need to figure out a way to cut costs. This would set the stage for doing something like that. It's very scary. Again, I question why aren't they infusing this ConOps with new products and services and technology if that wasn't their goal?

Eversole: Has General Johnson ever said that jobs might be lost with the Nested Office Concept or the Peer Cluster Concept?

Sobien: With the Nested Office Concept, we were never given any assurances. In fact, if you go back and read the Four Winds at the convention last year, General Johnson specifically said that he could not promise any of us or all of us would keep our jobs. At the corporate board meeting that happened in Baltimore last week, they did come out with a statement saying that as long as you can do the work, you can have a job. They were specifically vague on where that job will be and what your duties will be. You might be measuring water quality for fisheries or something instead of actually being a meteorologist for the NWS. I caution people again to read very carefully between the lines.

Eversole: In the latest email to all hands, it says we will demonstrate operability, performance, effectiveness and efficiency before committing to changes. What do they mean here?

Sobien: I think what they're saying is that everything in their plan will be prototyped and tested before it is expanded and done throughout the country. However, everybody needs to sit down and think about for just a few minutes what happened to the HMT's in this organization. CRS came along and believe it or not, CRS passed a prototype and was approved as being very successful and then sent out to the field. Everybody knows what a disaster CRS was. With the HMT's, then they proposed HMT's might not have to work midnights at all locations and wanted to make that change and obviously no one wanted to work midnights, then six months after that they proposed getting rid of the HMT's. My fear is that this Concept of Operations is just the same steps that they went through with the HMT unit. If you read part of that statement where it

says why change now, D.L. wrote, many of you have heard me discuss our unsustainable business/budget model that doesn't invest enough in our future and strains to meet our operating costs, 66% of which is labor. Gosh, tie all the strings together here. They're saying they're spending too much on labor. If that doesn't make you cringe a little bit, then you just aren't listening.

Eversole: The NWS just received a large boost to help fund positions that have not been filled. Doesn't that run counter to their assertion that we're headed to a budget disaster?

Sobien: If they actually use that money to fill positions, to slow down lapsed labor, to fund the things that they said haven't been funded like new technology, you would think there wouldn't be a problem. The 2007 budget, especially on the Senate side, looks very, very good, but this Concept of Operations and the test of this whole Concept of Operations is very, very expensive and they're getting the money to do this somewhere. You tell me where their priorities are. Are their priorities eating the seed corn that D.L. Johnson talks about all the time, or is it doing this new ConOps. You tell me. Show us the numbers.

Eversole: One thing that is hard for a lot of people to understand is why our NWS administration seems so bent and determined on some kind of consolidation of office functions. Even if we can believe that the ConOps is not to consolidate offices but simply to make weather functions work better, why do they seem so bent and determined on consolidating functions?

Sobien: I can't speak for them. I can only speculate that they see their job very differently than we see our job. They see their job as saving money everywhere they can. We see our job as saving lives and property and being the most effective organization we can. They see being the most efficient, we see being the most effective. I have no problem stating flat out that when this whole process started, it was all about cutting positions. It was all about saving money. Now it's not all about cutting positions and saving money anymore, yet the plan they are designing is to find ways to save money and cut positions. It doesn't create a new and better and more effective NWS, in fact it might do the opposite of that. Even if you take them at their word when they say we are just testing this out to see if it works, they are spending a tremendous amount of money, a tremendous amount, to test it out to see if it works without having any real idea that it will pay for itself at some time in the future. Like I said, I'll take them at their word, but it just seems kind of hard to believe.

Eversole: Let's imagine that the ConOps has been completely implemented, and everything that HQ has said would happen in the ConOps program has happened where no offices have been changed and supposedly no one's job has been moved. Why would the NWS go to so much trouble to insist upon this if there wasn't some other kind of benefit? It just seems like an incredibly expensive reorganization of our talents for a seemingly small gain. For example, they want to use the talents of the best office members for something such as severe weather forecasting and then have them work together to better the cluster. Why can't they do that without going through this expensive reorganization? Why can't we have a Tactical Meteorologist without going through this reorganization?

Sobien: I agree. Not only do I agree, but when the modernization was completed, the commission, and I believe the National Academy of Sciences, stated that the NWS should never, ever go through another reorganization like this again, and in fact said that the NWS should evolve into its own future. We have done that and done very well. The people who are very much supportive of ConOps like to pick and choose and say the ConOps (modernization – current state) that we have right now was designed before we had the internet, before there was GIS software and before communications became what they are. The NWS has evolved, and now we have the Ridge radars that overlay radar over on top of GIS information, and we do have communication networks that are much better, and we utilize the internet to the point that the internet is for the most part an operational feature in every one of our WFOs. We are doing all of that. So, the fact is we are evolving, so there must be a different reason for this, and I don't know what that reason is except that until somebody tells me what it is, I guess I assume that. We are a very effective agency. We are not fundamentally flawed. We are the best at what we do. Obviously, communication tools in 2015 are going to be much, much better than what they are right now. Obviously. There may be a day when I'm in Tampa forecasting, and if I want to talk to someone in Miami forecasting, it's just a matter of me looking at a screen, and they're right there. That might happen, and that certainly would make collaboration much, much easier. However, you don't need to redesign the whole concept of the NWS for that. It just seems to me that we can easily evolve into something like that, except that the only thing I can see is that they are looking for a way to cut people in the future, if they need to. I don't know that they're sitting there right now saying we're going to cut people, but they'll have the system in place where in three years, four years, five years someone says you have to cut people, they can, and I think that's what they're looking at. Another obvious thing to me that's a flaw in this whole cluster peer approach, is that it seems to me the cluster would change depending on the weather circumstances. For instance, the Chicago office may for part of the time find themselves naturally gravitated to a Great Lakes cluster when dealing with lake effect snows and winter storms, but perhaps a day, or month later might find themselves part of a Great Plains cluster dealing with severe weather. So, why would you want hard and fast boundaries as to where a cluster is? Why aren't clusters dynamic? Or better yet, why aren't all of the offices allowed to collaborate how they best see fit? This plan doesn't allow that. It creates instead of 122 WFOs, it's going to create 10, 15, 20, 30 clusters. It doesn't make sense to me. You're still going to have the same boundaries, you're still going to have the same boundary problems that we have, that we see with the grids. It doesn't address any of that. The only thing this plan addresses is how to do the job with less people. I can't say this enough that I take them at their word that that is not their goal right now, but read very closely what they wrote, read very closely.

Eversole: That is what a lot of people are reading as well. If you look at this from a common sense standpoint, there doesn't seem to be any motive or any rationale behind this other than to set a framework for cutting positions in the future. It's difficult to see any other purpose for this.

Sobien: I have tried to communicate that very same thing to the NWS, and I seem to be getting nowhere.

Eversole: Do you feel that the leaders of the NWS are united in their determination for this, or do you think that some members of the corporate board who feel that a different route might benefit the public more.

Sobien: I definitely think that there are a couple members of the corporate board who have reservations about this approach to varying degrees, but they are by far, by extremely far, in the minority.

Eversole: What has happened to residence training? It seems like we're hearing some legitimate concerns from the corporate board about the cost of residence training which is hard to argue against as it is expensive, but what are we supposed to do as NWS personnel now to receive good quality training?

Sobien: It's a good question, and it fits into the whole ConOps thing, too. Back during the modernization, we saw a tremendous improvement in our performance scores, and tornado lead times, flash flood lead times, all of that. A whole lot of it has to do with the new technology which was definitely a big part of it, but another big part of it was the fact that the NWS provided training. All forecasters went through a forecaster development course; people went through a radar course, the Awips training where they sent people to the field and hands on trained people, that's just not happening any more. For something like tornado lead times, we've been falling back on our goal. Our goal for fiscal year 2011 is to improve our tornado lead time increase by 2 minutes between now and 2011. That's not much of a goal. I think we're even talking about backing off on that or have backed off on that. I see that the NWS is spending a lot of money on training, but it doesn't seem to be the training that leads us to making those performance goals. There is a lot of training for ET's so they can fix the equipment which is very good but there seems to be a lot of managerial, leadership training which I don't want to minimize because I think it's very good because most of our managers did not come out of management schools as they were meteorologists, and I think it's important that they're trained, but that does not lead to better tornado lead times which could save lives or winter storm accuracy or marine wind speed accuracy. These are things that we really need to be focusing our money on and our attention on. Courses like the flash flood course just don't exist anymore. They've been replaced by tele-training and Comet modules. Some money has been spent on things that I think are very good such as Wes training and the D-Loc course, but nothing beats putting people in a room with an instructor and learning from the best and the brightest in the field. Hurricane forecasters should be out there training local staff on hurricanes. The best severe weather forecasters from SPC or offices in areas that get tremendous severe weather should be going around the country training or better yet having courses in Kansas City at the training center. We really as an agency need a commitment to either spend new money on training (the obvious best solution) but if we can't do that, in lieu of that, then some of these leadership type courses which all of the regions are doing and the national level is doing, should be reprogrammed into focused training on helping us achieve our performance goals. The reason why this ties into the ConOps plan is that this ConOps plan does not address training at all. There is no discussion at all in there on how to not only train the people to use software, but more importantly to train our people, our workers, on how to achieve these performance goals.

Eversole: We do have some alternatives to residence training. For example, the visit-view type of training. What is your opinion about the effectiveness of such distance methods of training compared with actual face-to-face training methods?

Sobien: I think distance learning is fine. It's especially good as a reinforcer. It's faster than in-house training in that you can get new ideas out to people a lot faster and can be utilized for that. However, for fundamental training and fundamental refreshers, nothing beats sitting down in a classroom and learning it. Colleges know this, the NWS itself knows this and that's why the leadership training they have is in-classroom training. It's very important, distance learning is a great tool and we're lucky to live in an age where it's so easy to have it, but it just does not replace sitting down and listening to a lecture from the experts. It just doesn't replace it.

Eversole: It seems like the corporate board views the benefits of technological advances differently from a lot of employees in the NWS because we're seeing a general movement away from the personal interaction that each weather office gives to the public. With training, we're seeing a movement away from the personal interaction there as well. Do you think it's possible that our corporate board is misinterpreting how best to use technology to improve the services of the NWS?

Sobien: Where they seem to have a disconnect is with how we do our job. I don't want this to sound too critical of the people in the corporate board because I genuinely think each and every one of them truly believe in their heart that they're doing the right thing and this is the right way to go, but my problem with them is that as you go through life, your perspective on the world changes. What they do and their perspective day in and day out are very, very different from a general forecaster in Grey, Maine for instance. It's very different. They live in a world of Washington politics, budgets, and million dollar contracts, and not in a world of where you need to let the lady down the street know that she needs to cover her flowers tonight because I think there might be frost. They can't put themselves in that framework of what the forecasters, HMT's, ET', Hydrologists, ASAs, etc, do and seem to not understand the importance of making the lady in Maine happy.

Eversole: Do you think it would be wise to suggest that corporate board members either directly spend some time in a weather office, such as working a set of shifts. I remember Jimmy Carter did a famous thing where to ensure that the government was hearing the concerns of the people; he invited every day citizens to come sit with him and discuss issues. Do you think it would be a good idea for the corporate board to discuss issues directly with people who are working in the field rather than listening to teams?

Sobien: I think, yes. Nothing could be better than having the top leadership of our office do the jobs of everybody, to actually be in their shoes and know what they're doing. When I got into the NWS, I had an MIC who was an area manager at the time, actually it was his deputy area manager, who from time to time would work HMT shifts just to remind himself about what everything was like so that he could sit down and understand what the HMTs were doing and what their issues were. That incredibly impressed me. I talked to this guy about the issues, and he understood it from other perspectives. I think that's very important. I understand how busy they are, and this will never happen, but there was one idea that came out of the ConOps plan that again seems to have floated away and that was the idea that the headquarters divisions would be moved out of Washington and moved into the WFOs. Actually, they've kind of done that with Fire Weather already, moved the Fire Weather program to Boise. I would suggest that they take it a step further in that the people working in the marine program, the aviation program, all

those big programs, we'll pick on the marine program arbitrarily, that perhaps the head of it might work in Seattle, but the people working underneath him or her might be scattered at other coastal cities like L.A., Houston, Miami or even Sterling. These people would be required to work a certain percentage of shift work like a SOO or WCM would. That way, they would stay in touch with the users and the forecasters and get out of that whole Washington mentality. That was, I thought, a great idea that came out of the ConOps, but unfortunately that seems to have disappeared. I don't see that in the current plans as well as I don't see my objections in the current plan. In fact, the more and more that you look at this ConOps plan, this clustered peer plan, it deals with nothing but the WFOs. Why is that happening? Why is it not looking at headquarters and national centers and RFCs? Why not? Again, I keep coming back to they're looking for a way to get rid of people, and that's where all the people are, of course with the exception of headquarters which has about a thousand people by the way, counting contractors.

Eversole: What efforts are you doing right now to express the concerns of employees to the corporate board?

Sobien: To their credit, I am a full serving member of something called the coordination team which coordinates all three ConOps teams that are out there. I am allowed to speak my mind; I am not muzzled at all. I believe everybody on that team will tell you that I do speak my mind maybe more that I should. I have been invited to the corporate board meetings, to the sessions of the corporate board meetings, where they talk about the ConOps. I feel like I haven't really been given much of a voice to express my, or ours as an institution I guess I should say, our opinion on things. A lot of the stuff that they read in this interview might come as a shock to them that I feel this way, because literally, I am not allowed to speak except when spoken to at these meetings. We will continue to try and sway the plan to something that, you know our job is two fold, one is that we have a responsibility to our members to protect not only their current jobs, but their positions and their chances for advancement, that's why we're here, that's why people pay dues and that's what we're working towards. Also, you know as public servants, and we're all public servants, I feel like we have a duty to the American public to make sure that we are the most effective agency in the world. We're not a business. Our bottom line isn't some profit at the end, it's not cutting costs to show a profit. Our bottom line is saving lives and property, and we should do that as efficiently as we can, but we should do that as best we can. Nobody's life is worth saving two or three positions at some office somewhere in the country.

We will take every step necessary to make sure that the plan is be agreeable.

Eversole: The NWSEO were able to get Congress to adopt language to stop implementation of the Nested Office concept which would have made much more radical changes to the structure of the NWS. I would imagine such methods will remain on the table as you see fit?

Sobien: I see nothing more important to the NWSEO right now than this ConOps plan. Everything that has to do with this ConOps plan, where even in some locations where I suspect that they already testing doing things with less people. We will use every resource that we have at our disposal to keep anything that might hurt our members from happening.

Eversole: Is there anything that the members can do to help?

Sobien: We need their support. Obviously, if you're not a member, we need you to join. If you are a member, we need your help. We need in every way we can, volunteering for service, writing letters. This is a fight for the survival of the NWS. This is their fight for their future. They may not even agree with everything that we're doing, and I understand that, but please understand though that we're doing what we think is best so that not only can they have a future, but all of those people who are in meteorology schools right now who want nothing more than to grow up and be a meteorologist with the NWS, that they too will have a future.

Eversole: Some people feel that joining the NWSEO will somehow make management perceive them as not being a team player. What do you think about that?

Sobien: The facts are that management often times looks to the ranks of the NWSEO to fill their own management positions. We regularly lose officers out of the NWSEO to become SOOs, WCMs and MICs all around the country. On top of that, managers are joining the NWSEO as associate members in record numbers. Managers are contributing to our PAC fund in numbers like we've never, ever seen before. While I can't guarantee that there are not some managers out there who would discriminate against you because of your NWSEO membership, I do think there is an equal number out there who look very, very favorably upon active, proactive people who are leaders trying to shape the agency as best they can.

Eversole: You would say becoming a member would be an employee's way to save not only their own career, but the NWS?

Sobien: I agree.