28 January 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
230 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
232 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
419 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
204 U.S. Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressional Leaders,

On behalf of the Friends of NOAA (FoNOAA) Coalition, we would like to express our concerns regarding the effects of the recent 35-day government shutdown on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. From private industry stakeholders, to contractors, to academic institutions, the impacts of the shutdown reached far beyond those felt immediately by NOAA employees. While we appreciate the re-opening of the government through a three-week continuing resolution, FoNOAA urges President Trump and Congress to reach an agreement to avoid another potential shutdown and provide robust funding to NOAA in the FY2019 Commerce Justice Science Appropriations bill. The following examples are just a few of the many ways the shutdown negatively impacted NOAA and our nation’s scientific enterprise.

• Over 3,600 of the 4,200 employees of the National Weather Service (NWS) worked without pay in order to keep 325 million Americans informed and safe. Although they continued to provide forecasts and warnings of impending weather, they were directed to cease providing critical services to their communities, such as emergency preparedness activities with local emergency managers, storm spotter classes, and community outreach on social media.

• Similarly, the National Hurricane Center cancelled annual preparedness training for emergency managers from Gulf Coast and East Coast communities. These cancelled classes cannot be made up before this year’s hurricane season, putting the lives and safety of millions that live along our coasts in jeopardy. In addition, Hurricane Center staff were not permitted to utilize this off-season to continue their research or to improve hurricane forecasting models and techniques.

• NOAA was unable to release important scientific data, such as the annual temperature analysis and annual disaster cost estimate for 2018. This is crucial data not only for scientists in the United States, but across the globe, who are studying the impacts of climate change on communities around the world. Following Hurricanes Michael and Florence, and one of the most destructive wildfire seasons in California’s history, this data is critical to study trends of hazards that are becoming more common and costly.
• All but one of the 50 employees of the NWS’s Environmental Modeling Center were furloughed. This will result in a delay in the launch that was planned later this year of the next-generation global forecasting system, the Finite Volume Cubed-Sphere (FV3). The FV3 will be the most significant upgrade to the NWS’s global forecast model since 1980. However, due to the shutdown, communities across the nation will go without this enormous improvement in U.S. weather forecasting for even longer.

• Several hundred NOAA employees annually attend the American Meteorological Society’s meeting in January each year, where research findings are shared between public, private and academic communities. This critical opportunity for scientists to bridge research to operations was lost due to the shutdown, which prevented the participation of all NOAA employees at the five-day meeting. This resulted in missing out on a critical opportunity to share knowledge across sectors and with international counterparts to strengthen our nation’s weather and ocean enterprise.

• The nation’s portal for climatic data (ncdc.noaa.gov) was unavailable to the public with the lapse in appropriations. This portal is critical for private sector meteorologists and the legal community to obtain data records used in forensic analysis and court proceedings. Therefore, the lapse in appropriations has caused an economic harm to the private weather sector.

• NOAA’s contractors were not being paid for work already performed or still being performed on programs where ‘stop work orders’ were not issued. The shutdown’s ripple effects reach far greater than federal employees – they also extend to the private and academic sectors that work with NOAA.

From fisheries, to weather forecasts, to research, NOAA was deeply affected by the government shutdown, and future impacts will be felt for months and even years to come. FoNOAA urges you to reach an agreement to avoid another future government shutdown and strongly fund NOAA in the FY2019 Commerce Justice Science Bill. Thank you for your consideration of this matter, and please let us know if there is any additional information we can provide.

Sincerely,

Friends of NOAA Co-Chairs

Carissa Bunge  
*Senior Public Affairs Specialist*  
American Geophysical Union

Ari Gerstman  
*Director of Washington Operations*  
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