



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3605

May 23, 2024

Dr. Kenneth Graham
Director
National Weather Service
1325 East West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Director Graham:

We write to express serious concerns on the recent reports of outages to the National Weather Service's (NWS) network and equipment. On multiple occurrences this year, some of NWS life-saving services, including radar data, the Automated Surface Observing System, and transmitters of NOAA Weather Radio, have been reported as nonfunctional for extended periods of time. These outages have impacted NWS Weather Forecast Offices and the public at large, removing critical tools for observation and communicating severe weather. Due to this, we request additional information on NWS infrastructure, budget, and future planning to prevent additional outages from occurring.

In the early morning hours of April 2, 2024, an intermittent hardware failure of the circuit that services the NWS data center in College Park, MD occurred, and the automated backup did not execute as planned and had to be manually overridden by NWS and vendor engineers.¹ This resulted in 4 to 5 hours of service disruptions with latent radar data and warnings delivered via Wireless Emergency Alerts or the internet being delayed or missed.² On April 5, NOAA released a statement identifying the root cause of this occurrence and claiming to have changed the system configuration to prevent similar outages.³

Yet, on April 11, 2024, Weather Forecast Offices in both Wakefield, VA and Dover, DE reported communication outages and radar outages during a period of forecasted severe thunderstorms.⁴ Even more concerning, on April 15, it was reported that a national widespread outage of NWS radar system occurred, with roughly half of all NWS weather radars appearing to

¹ Adam Mazmanian, *NWS Says Partial Circuit Failure Caused Network Outage*, NEXTGOV (Apr. 5, 2024), <https://www.nextgov.com/modernization/2024/04/nws-says-partial-circuit-failure-caused-network-outage/395524/>.

² *Ibid.*

³ Julie Bryson, *National Weather Service Releases Additional Statement Regarding Recent Radar Outage*, WPSD LOCAL 6 (Apr. 5, 2024), https://www.wpsdlocal6.com/news/national-weather-service-releases-additional-statement-regarding-recent-radar-outage/article_1b3d52ba-f352-11ee-a51b-b7966a453d11.html.

⁴ Kay Smythe, *Weather Radar Systems Keep Glitching and It Could Be A Huge Problem*, DAILY CALLER (Apr. 15, 2024), <https://dailycaller.com/2024/04/15/national-weather-service-nws-radar-systems-glitch-malfunction-storms-plains/>.

be offline in the early morning hours.⁵ NOAA has not released a statement for either the April 11 or April 15 event.

Additionally, these outages have occurred during a period in which NOAA is transitioning to a new financial system. This transition has been riddled with setbacks, which has resulted in periodic disruptions to weather equipment and access since January of this year. In Rome, GA, a public-use airport lost access to the Automated Surface Observing System for a day and pilots were blind to weather events for 40 to 60 miles around the airport.⁶ In Cullman, AL, a NOAA Weather Radio (NWR) transmitter was down for two weeks and citizens who utilize NWR for life-saving alerts in this tornado-prone region were left in the dark.⁷ In both of these cases, the outages occurred because federal officials didn't pay electric bills.

While the National Weather Service plans for a cumulative total of 11 days' worth of outages in any given year, multiple occurrences in such a short period of time this early in the year is cause for concern.⁸ According to NWS, the proposed funding in the President's FY25 budget would bring these integral systems up to 99% operational capability, or only 3 days' worth of outages.⁹

However, it is worth noting that NOAA's budget has increased by 18% over the last 5 years.¹⁰ Additionally, implementation of new funding can take time to produce results and NWS cannot assume a linear growing budget in this period of inflation and growing national debt. Therefore, NWS should be able identify immediate mitigation measures as well as future priorities for multiple budget scenarios, all of which should continue the mission of the National Weather Service to produce impact-based decision support services for the protection of life and property and enhancement of the national economy.

To better understand recent NWS outages, as well as immediate and long-term solutions, we request a response to answer the following questions:

1. What steps is NWS taking to immediately prevent future outages? What steps can only be taken if FY 25 appropriations match the President's Budget Request?
2. Given current funding levels, what plans, strategies, or outlooks are in place to avoid failures of services and improve resiliency?

⁵ Smythe, *supra* note 4.

⁶ Jack Fitzpatrick, *Latest Disaster for National Weather Service: Paying Its Bills*, BLOOMBERG GOVERNMENT (Apr. 8, 2024), <https://news.bgov.com/bloomberg-government-news/latest-disaster-for-national-weather-service-paying-its-bills>.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Bryson, *supra* note 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ American Institute of Physics, *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Budget: FY 2020 appropriations: \$5.34B; FY 2024 appropriations: \$6.32B*, <https://ww2.aip.org/fyi/fy2025-noaa-budget-and-appropriations>.

3. Can NWS provide a breakdown of specific activities within the Integrated Dissemination Program and how each was funded in FY 23 and FY 24, including funding for hardware and software systems? What are specific updates that NWS has made?
4. NWS stated changes have been made to the automatic network backup process to ensure the system is configured to move to a backup data center in Boulder, CO. Can you describe the changes made and detail any expected threshold of failure below 100% that will trigger an automatic backup?
5. In regard to the implantation of a new financial system, has NWS identified any upcoming or still unpaid expenses related to weather equipment, services, or data?
6. If a future disaster response requires additional services or personnel, does NWS have a contingency plan to avoid a backlog of reimbursement payments?
7. Has the current backlog of reimbursement payments affected any contracts with private companies?

Sincerely,



Stephanie Bice
Member of Congress



Frank D. Lucas
Member of Congress



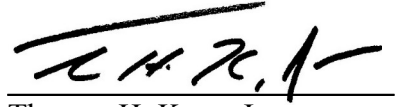
Kevin Hern
Member of Congress



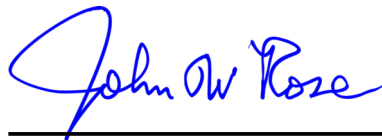
Josh Brecheen
Member of Congress



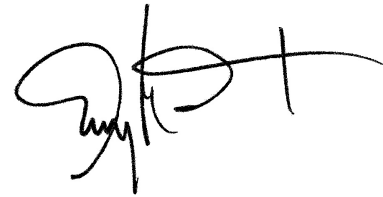
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