

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6375
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February 6, 2019

Rear Adm. Timothy Gallaudet, Ph.D, (USN Ret.)
Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and
Acting Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Acting Under Secretary Gallaudet:

The Committee on Science, Space & Technology is conducting oversight of the operations of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration during the government shutdown that began on December 22, 2018 and concluded on January 25, 2019. It is clear from multiple media reports that the government shutdown had a significant impact on federal science agencies, their contractors, grant recipients and others who depend on federal funds to engage in research, development and related activities. Last year the federal budget for these activities was more than \$175 billion.¹

Because of the federal shutdown, PhD students were not able to communicate with their advisers, hampering their education; postdoctoral students on fellowships were not being paid; non-government scientists were unable to obtain federal permits to complete various studies; and access to federal data, scientific collections and other resources temporarily ceased.² Federal scientists were also forced to cancel long-planned research trips and attendance at scientific meetings, academic scientists were not able to communicate with their federal peers on projects or scientific papers they are collaborating on, and research projects simply stopped as funding channels for federal grants and other scientific research efforts were temporarily halted.³

¹ FY 2018 R&D Appropriations Dashboard, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), accessed here: <https://www.aaas.org/programs/r-d-budget-and-policy/fy-2018-rd-appropriations-dashboard>

² Lauren Morello, "US science agencies hit by government shutdown," *Nature*, December 22, 2018, accessed here: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07836-6>

³ See: Gisele Grayson, Joe Palca and Geoff Brumfiel, "With Key Government Agencies Shut Down, Science Sputters," *National Public Radio (NPR)*, January 10, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/10/683716451/with-key-government-agencies-shut-down-science-sputters> and Carolyn Wilke, "Government Shutdown Hits Funding, Resources, and Morale in Science," *The Scientist*, January

The federal scientific grant process helps to empower American innovation and energize our economy. Since many of these activities were halted during the shutdown, this will undoubtedly delay scientific research, fieldwork, and the examination of issues critical to the health, safety and security of all Americans across the nation and our competitive advantage around the world.⁴ I am concerned that these disruptions and delays throughout many science agencies have hindered the federal scientific enterprise as a result of the shutdown and may lead to longer-term damage.

Despite the five-week shutdown, over 3,000 National Weather Service (NWS) employees deemed “necessary to protect life and property” continued to work without pay 24/7 throughout the duration of the shutdown to ensure that there would be no gaps in timely and accurate weather forecasts.⁵ These weather forecasts rely on critical real-time data from NOAA’s National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service (NESDIS) operations, as well as from radar coverage provided by the NEXRAD system.

In addition, the shutdown had a negative and consequential impact on the livelihoods, families and health of federal workers.⁶ It is also unclear how individual agencies determined which staff were deemed “essential” and which staff were not.⁷ Tens of thousands of workers who were not deemed “essential” at the beginning of the shutdown were then called back to work without pay.⁸ Furthermore, some federal contractors may not receive back pay for their time working during the government shutdown and others payed their workers out of their own pockets during the shutdown without any assurance they will be paid back by the federal government.⁹

In order to assist the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in its oversight, please provide copies of the records requested below and answers to the following questions:

11, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/government-shutdown-hits-funding--resources--and-morale-in-science--65314>

⁴ Lauren Morello, “US science agencies hit by government shutdown,” *Nature*, December 22, 2018, accessed here: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07836-6>

⁵ <https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/2018-12/DOC%20Lapse%20Plan%20-%20OMB%20Approved%20-%20Dec%2017%2C%202018.pdf>

⁶ Michael Burke, “Federal worker with diabetes says she can’t afford to pay for insulin during shutdown,” *The Hill*, January 13, 2019, accessed here: <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/425113-federal-worker-with-diabetes-says-she-cant-afford-to-pay-for>

⁷ Kimberly Adams, “Definition of an essential worker does a shutdown shift,” *Marketplace*, American Public Media, January 17, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.marketplace.org/2019/01/17/economy/definition-essential-worker-does-shutdown-shift>

⁸ Erica Werner, “Trump administration calling nearly 50,000 back to work, unpaid, as shutdown drags on,” *The Washington Post*, January 15, 2019, accessed here: https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/rank-and-file-democrats-reject-trumps-invitation-to-shutdown-talks-backing-leaders-in-united-opposition-to-border-wall/2019/01/15/2539482e-18d2-11e9-9ebf-c5fed1b7a081_story.html?utm_term=.59db4d3835ca

⁹ See: Jennifer Crompton, “Federal contractor pays workers despite shutdown,” *WMUR/Channel 9*, Manchester, New Hampshire, January 23, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.wmur.com/article/federal-contractor-pays-workers-despite-shutdown/26016877> and Sarah Ruiz-Grossman, “Shutdown Leaves Government Contractors Without Work And Likely No Back Pay,” (*updated*) January 2, 2019, accessed here: www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/government-contractors-shutdown-wages-lost_us_5c255621e4b08aaf7a8ed79a

- The total number of federal employees in your agency and how many were furloughed as a result of the government shutdown.
 - How many contractors are employed by your agency, and how many were furloughed as a result of the government shutdown?
 - Please provide all Agency records, including memoranda, guidance documents, legal opinions, summaries, or other documents provided to federal contractors about continuing their work for the Agency during the shutdown, including all records provided to federal contractors regarding Agency guidance on using their own funds during the government shutdown.
- How many of your agency’s employees were deemed “essential?”
 - Indicate how many of your staff, if any, not deemed “essential” were brought back to work without pay during the government shutdown, and for what programs or activities.
 - Please provide all records, including memoranda, guidance documents, legal opinions, summaries, or other documents that indicate how your Agency has defined an “essential” employee. This should include any specific tasks or functions that your Agency has deemed “essential.”
- Copies of all records, including memoranda, summaries, after action reports or other documents that indicate the potential or actual impact, delay or damage to research efforts within your agency that were adversely affected by the government shutdown.
- Government shutdowns incur costs greater than those of an open, fully functioning federal government.¹⁰ Please provide all agency assessments, impact analyses, memoranda, or other records that address both the potential, actual or anticipated cost and consequences from the government shutdown on your agency.
- An itemized list of travel plans by agency employees, contractors and grantee recipients that were postponed, rescheduled or cancelled as a result of the government shutdown.
- An itemized list of mandated reports to Congress that will be delayed due to the federal government shutdown and when they will be expected to be received.
- A summary of impacts, including any delays, to the schedule of the ongoing Service Life Extension Program (SLEP) for the National Weather Service’s NEXRAD system due to the government shutdown.

¹⁰ Jim Tankersley, “A Shut Down Government Actually Costs More Than an Open One,” *New York Times*, January 9, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/us/politics/shutdown-government-costs.html>

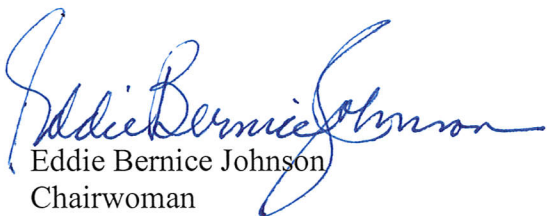
- A summary of impacts to hurricane model updates, and hurricane preparedness efforts and trainings with local and state emergency managers for the 2019 hurricane season due to the government shutdown.
- What are the impacts on the improvement to weather models, including any delays of expected operationalization of the FV3 Global Forecast System due to the government shutdown?
- Impacts to the development of satellites within NESDIS, including any slippage in satellite launch dates due to the government shutdown.
- A summary of impacts to satellite operations relied upon by the National Weather Service for accurate and timely forecasts during the federal government shutdown, including the timing of the transition from GOES-17 to GOES West.

Under the “special oversight” clause of Rule X of the U.S. House of Representatives, the “Committee on Science, Space, and Technology shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development.”¹¹

Please produce two sets of requested records in a searchable electronic format. One set should be delivered to the Majority Staff of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in Room 2321 of the Rayburn House Office Building and one set should be delivered to the Minority Staff in Room #394 of the Ford House Office Building. Please ensure these documents are produced and delivered by Thursday, February 14, 2019.

If you have any questions regarding this request please have your staff contact Priyanka Hooghan on the Majority Staff of the Science Committee at (202) 225-6375.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman

Committee on Science, Space & Technology

cc: Rep. Frank Lucas, Ranking Member, Committee on Science, Space & Technology

¹¹ Rule X, Organization of Committees, U.S. House of Representatives, accessed here: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/HMAN-115/xml/HMAN-115-pg441.xml>