

House committees discuss FY 2019 NOAA budget request

April 12, 2018

Rear Admiral Timothy Gallaudet, Ph.D., the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and Acting Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), testified at two House committee hearings about NOAA's fiscal year (FY) 2019 budget request. On April 11, Rear Admiral Gallaudet testified before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science, and on April 12, he appeared before the House Committee on Natural Resources along with panelists representing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and four power marketing administrations.

In Rear Admiral Gallaudet's testimony, he stated that NOAA's FY 2019 budget request of about \$4.6 billion – a decrease of \$1.3 billion or 23 percent below the FY 2018 omnibus enacted level – prioritizes investment in the core missions at NOAA. He identified the agency's core government functions as implementing the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act with improved weather and water observations, modeling, and forecasting; launching and operating next generation Earth observing satellites; and providing at-sea data collection capabilities for fisheries management and nautical charting. His testimony highlighted NOAA's contributions to information and emergency response during the 2017 hurricane season and recent wildfires, which included improved hurricane and flood models, land surveying from NOAA's King Air aircraft, updated nautical charts after the storms, early sighting of new wildfires from the GOES-16 satellite, and on-site support and weather forecasts to assist with wildfire response efforts. He also emphasized the work NOAA is doing to bridge the forecast gap between the existing two-week predictions and longer term weather outlooks using the North American Multi-Model Ensemble (NMME) seasonal forecast system.

At the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee hearing, Representative Robert Aderholt (R-AL-4) asked about the status of NOAA's Commercial Weather Data Pilot Program. While Rear Admiral Gallaudet's testimony stated that the Office of Space Commerce budget would increase by 50 percent, he acknowledged that the commercial space industry was not evolving as fast as it should for operational weather observations, but noted that the pilot program will increase funding and seek future commercial technologies and data production beyond its initial requests for radio occultation capabilities.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Jose Serrano (D-NY-15) expressed concern about the reduction in funding and 248 full-time employment positions from the National Weather Service (NWS). However, Rear Admiral Gallaudet said that he did not think those reductions would risk lives and property, and that, based on three studies, NWS forecast centers could operate more efficiently, with fewer people and work hours, increased automation, and improved processing.

Democratic members at both hearings questioned the proposed cuts to and elimination of certain ocean, coastal, and climate programs, many of which provide grants to state and local governments. Rear Admiral Gallaudet re-emphasized that these proposed cuts or eliminations reflect the difficult decisions that Secretary of Commerce Wilber Ross had to make in order to help reduce the budget deficit and prioritize resources for core mission functions and services at NOAA.

Sources: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. House of Representatives
