

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
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UNDER SECRETARY OF COMMERCE FOR OCEANS AND ATMOSPHERE  
AND NOAA ADMINISTRATOR  
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**JOINT HEARING ON  
TRACKING THE STORM AT THE NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTER**

**BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT AND THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATION AND OVERSIGHT  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**JULY 19, 2007**

I am here in response to your request for testimony on issues concerning the Tropical Prediction Center's National Hurricane Center. The Committee has asked me to provide an account of events relating to the hiring of and recent decision to place on leave the Director of the Tropical Prediction Center ("TPC"), Mr. William Proenza.

Before I begin, however, I want to make clear to the Committee and all the residents of coastal states in no uncertain terms that NOAA, the National Weather Service and the TPC are fully prepared for this hurricane season. Our forecasting ability continues to improve and the American people can expect nothing less than the full capabilities of the National Hurricane Center.

The scientists and forecasters at the TPC answer to one of the highest callings in public service – the protection of life and property. They have dedicated their careers to preparing their fellow citizens for the dangers brought on by tropical weather. When a storm is bearing down, they continue to calmly provide accurate and timely forecasts.

It is for these reasons that we want to provide them with all the support they need to do their jobs.

In summer 2006, the then-Director of the TPC, Max Mayfield, informed me of his decision to retire, and D.L. Johnson, the then-Director of the National Weather Service, initiated a search for a replacement. In November, General Johnson, with the concurrence of the Deputy Under Secretary, General (Ret.) Jack Kelly, recommended to me that William Proenza be appointed as Director of the TPC.

Mr. Proenza began employment at the TPC on January 6, 2007. During January to May 2007, Mr. Proenza made a series of statements to the media regarding the TPC's budget and the potential loss of NASA's QuikScat research satellite. The statements about the budget were not factually accurate and the statements about the satellite were misleading and potentially detrimental in terms of public confidence in the Center's forecasts. I felt that some of these statements could have been the result of Mr. Proenza's being new to the TPC and not yet up to speed in terms of his new role. To address these concerns, I instructed senior management to work with him throughout the spring and to provide him with the necessary information and training to succeed as TPC Director, including detailed budget information relating to TPC operations.

On June 11, 2007, Mary Glackin, a 30-year career NOAA employee with 22 years of experience in the National Weather Service, became the Acting Director of the National Weather Service. In assuming her duties, Ms. Glackin was made aware of the need to improve managerial rigor throughout National Weather Service operations. Accordingly, at the outset of her tenure, Ms. Glackin communicated to senior staff the need for adherence to organizational policies, procedures, and the chain of command.

With respect to Mr. Proenza, Ms. Glackin was advised that since January, “there [had] been times when [Mr. Proenza] may have disregarded the direct instructions of [his] supervisor, the Director, National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP), or [had] made decisions on [his] own which [he] had no authority to make.” For example, Ms. Glackin had learned that Mr. Proenza instructed forecasters to replace the TPC heading with the “National Hurricane Center” label on the March 4 High Seas forecast. Because this action embedded the word “hurricane” in the forecast, it set off a “pan pan” alarm – a non-life threatening distress call -- on every ship in the Pacific Ocean. To make sure there was no misunderstanding and to clarify management expectations, Ms. Glackin issued a memorandum on “Operating Procedures/Instructions,” dated Thursday June 14, (attached) and met with Mr. Proenza in person in Florida the next day, to discuss its contents.

Ms. Glackin’s memo was not a reprimand. After identifying the “pan pan” alarm and other instances over the past five months that had prompted her to prepare the memo, it acknowledged that “[s]ome of this . . . might have resulted from some confusion as to the various roles and responsibilities in the [National Weather Service.]” Ms. Glackin, however, wanted to reiterate to him her instructions about adhering to organizational policies, procedures and the chain of command, and that going forward she “expect[ed] that [Mr. Proenza] and [his] staff will follow the directions and the policies and procedures developed by NCEP.”

In particular, Ms. Glackin asked Mr. Proenza to consult on a regular basis with his direct supervisor on issues concerning “budget, science, research, and operational or administrative issues” that had “NOAA- or [National Weather Service]-wide implications

or public safety consequences.” Ms. Glackin expressly stated that she was “available to resolve any disagreements,” once the two had discussed the matter fully, and expressed the intention to “work together to ensure accurate predictions and to support the work of [the NCEP], [the National Weather Service], and NOAA.”

On the evening of June 18, Ms. Glackin received a request from an employee at the TPC for a conference call. The call took place on Tuesday, June 19, with eleven TPC employees participating. These included seven of the nine TPC Hurricane Specialists; the TPC Union Steward agreed this meeting was requested by the TPC group and did not constitute a formal meeting requiring official notification to the union.

During that call, Center employees raised several serious concerns about Mr. Proenza’s actions, and whether they could do their job under Mr. Proenza’s leadership. These concerns are reflected in a memorandum for the record (attached) including:

- They feared Mr. Proenza would take retaliatory action against them if he learned they were voicing their views, some stating they “were scared” of Mr. Proenza and others that they were “deep[ly] concern[ed] that their future was at stake if this meeting got out,”
- They felt “muzzled” by Mr. Proenza, citing as an example the development of priorities for improving hurricane forecasting agreed to by the hurricane specialists, “but not approved by [Mr. Proenza],” and therefore not permitted to go forward to NCEP/NWS,
- They lacked confidence in Mr. Proenza’s knowledge of the hurricane program and were concerned that Mr. Proenza would make decisions about its future without the required knowledge or willingness to listen to staff,

- They believed the QuikScat issue had been “overblown” and its representation in the media “is not accurate,”
- They questioned his “integrity” and were “outraged” at his misrepresenting the actions and views of his staff in the office and media, and
- They felt Mr. Proenza’s actions were generating “turmoil,” “anxiety,” “fear,” and a loss of “cohesiveness” at the Center.

Ms. Glackin and Dr. Uccellini were gravely concerned by what they had heard, and communicated to me their conclusion that immediate action was necessary. Given the fact that seven of the nine TPC Hurricane Center forecasters were expressing these concerns, it was their assessment that if the current situation persisted, the Center would have difficulty fulfilling its life-saving mission. Because of the serious nature of the situation, I consulted with my chain of command and we determined we had no other choice but to take action. Had we failed to act, we would have been derelict in our duties as public servants charged with protecting people’s lives.

However, in our judgment, the need for prompt action had to be balanced with making sure we had a clear understanding of the situation and were fair to all concerned. We therefore decided that the right approach was to convene an independent assessment of the Center’s management and operations and its ability to meet its mission, and to set a fairly short deadline for completion of this assessment.

Accordingly, on June 26, I requested that Dr. James Turner, NIST’s Deputy Director, lead a team to undertake this charge. A copy of my memo to Dr. Turner is attached. On July 2, a memo was distributed to all employees of the Tropical Prediction Center advising them that I had asked for this independent operational assessment

(attached). I further stressed that the “candid views and opinions of the entire TPC team are extremely important to this assessment” and encouraged “everyone’s engagement, participation, and support of this endeavor without fear of retaliation or criticism.” I also advised staff that the team would be touring the Center and would be available to conduct individual and group interviews.

On Friday, July 6, Dr. Turner and his team provided me with a preliminary assessment and recommendation regarding management of the Center (attached). Specifically, the team advised me that, based on their first-hand observations, “the continued presence of Director Proenza at the TPC will interfere with the ability of the Assessment Team to complete its work.” Moreover, it was the “unanimous opinion of the Assessment Team that Mr. Proenza’s actions during the assessment have not only failed to calm his staff but have actually resulted in a level of anxiety and disruption that threatens the TPC’s ability to fulfill its mission to protect the American people.” In a series of documented incidents, Mr. Proenza had questioned a senior forecaster at his work station about his interview, which made the forecaster uncomfortable and upset; he approached other staff and asked for their support before they spoke with the Team; and he held media interviews on the operations floor about the assessment while the hurricane specialists were performing their duties analyzing tropical activity. The Team thus recommended that Mr. Proenza be “temporarily removed from active direction of the Center until such time as the assessment is complete and has been reviewed by NOAA management.”

On Saturday, July 7, 2007, Ms. Glackin sent me a memo, agreeing with the recommendation of the Assessment Team, and recommending that Mr. Proenza be placed on leave (attached).

The following Monday morning, July 9, Mr. Proenza was advised that he was being placed on leave, and that the reason for doing so was based on the preliminary determination of the independent assessment team that his presence was interfering with the Team's completing its work, and resulting in a "level of anxiety and disruption that threatens the [Center's] ability to fulfill its mission to protect the American people." A copy of the memo issued to Mr. Proenza is attached to my testimony. A memo was then distributed to Center employees advising them that Mr. Proenza would be on leave until further notice, and that Deputy Director Ed Rappaport would serve as acting Director of the Center during this period (attached).

On July 13, Dr. Turner and the Assessment Team completed the report. A copy of the report is attached to my testimony. The Team found that the TPC is technically equipped to continue to provide accurate and timely information regarding hurricane-related activities. Specifically, the TPC's readiness has been strengthened by the addition of four new hurricane specialists in late 2006 (a two-thirds increase over prior years), the addition of a new hurricane forecast model this year, additional buoys, and a new instrument on the hurricane reconnaissance planes that will provide surface wind data.

At the same time, the Team found that "the short-term ability of the TPC to provide accurate and timely information was put at risk due to the TPC director's disruptive conduct and the lack of trust between many staff and the director." Even more pointedly, "the team concluded that the TPC's ability to achieve its mission was seriously

threatened because of the environment which had been created by the director's statements and actions." The Team cited actions by Mr. Proenza that intimidated some staff, alienated others, damaged teamwork, and produced fears of retaliation. In short, the Team found that "[t]he negative work environment, exacerbated by the director, has had – and is likely to continue to have – a major deleterious impact on the center's ability to fulfill its mission, if he is allowed to return to his position."

Drawing on these findings, the Team recommended immediate action with respect to Mr. Proenza, due to his failure of leadership:

The current TPC director should be reassigned and not be allowed to return to his position at the center. This should be done due to his failure to demonstrate leadership within the TPC rather than due to his public statements about [the] QuikSCAT satellite or NOAA leadership. A replacement should be recruited as soon as possible through a nation-wide, full and open competition.

I want to note that the report also includes a number of other recommendations for improvement of the TPC, NCEP, NWS and NOAA. These include better management approaches (e.g., establishing "clear, written statements of authority for decision making throughout the management chain at TPC"), enhanced employee training and leadership development programs (e.g., "[i]nstitut[ing] formal succession planning and leadership programs for developing staff from within"), additional support for identifying and addressing technical needs, tighter linkages with the research and user communities (e.g., establishing a "user group to provide regular input" to the Center), clearer visioning, improved organizational structure in certain areas, stronger integration of the TPC into its parent organization, and constantly improving public education and outreach.

I have directed the Deputy Under Secretary, Jack Kelly, to lead a review of the report and provide a response to the Team's recommendations within two weeks' time

(attached). Following the same procedures we have used in responding to GAO reports, General Kelly will comment on the report's findings and recommendations and detail the steps to be taken to address the identified concerns.

Let me say at this point that William Proenza has a long and distinguished career with the National Weather Service. Any decisions I may make with regard to these recommendations will be made on the merits of the team's assessment of operations at the National Hurricane Center and not on any other issues or public comments Mr. Proenza may have made.

And finally, I'd like to note that the official forecasts of the Tropical Prediction Center do not come out of a computer. They do not come from a single satellite. Hurricane forecasting, at its core, still comes down to a team of specialists coming together to analyze all available data and using their best expertise and wisdom to make a forecast. The American people need to know that when a storm is bearing down, those forecasters are focused on only one thing, that they feel free to offer their views and that they are supported at the very highest levels. Again, the scientists and forecasters at the TPC – indeed, employees throughout the National Weather Service and NOAA, including myself – answer to one of the highest callings in public service – the protection of life and property, and we are fully prepared for this hurricane season.