

Interview with Mary M. Glackin, Deputy Under Secretary for Operations, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Interviewer: Doria B. Grimes, Senior Analyst, Riverside Technology, Inc.

M. Glackin: Thank you. It is a real pleasure to have some time to reminisce about Dave Johnson. As I recall, I met Dave Johnson in the early 1990's. At that time he had left NOAA, and he was over with the National Academy, and, in particular, he was the Study Director¹ for a Committee over there that really was very instrumental in providing advice and guidance to the National Weather Service on its modernization activities.

The modernization of the National Weather Service, which ultimately was tremendously successful, was really an awesome challenge because it involved not only infusing new technology, but also restructuring the work force to be a highly trained professional workforce, and downsizing the number of offices or service outlets we had. And we had to do all of that without degrading service through that whole period of time, which ultimately spanned about a dozen years.

D. Grimes: You were a member of the committee?

M. Glackin: I was in the National Weather Service and I was a Program Manager there. I was the AWIPS² Program Manager, and I was the Modernization Systems Program Manager at one point. So I had responsibilities for the development and the integration of technology into operations. That was one of the necessary, but not sufficient factors that influenced, for example, the closing of older forecast offices and the opening of new ones.

I would have to say how skillfully Dave was able to bring his expertise to bear in that role. Because when you reflect on it, he had been a federal manager for decades. So he understood well the challenges of being a federal manager, the vagaries of the budget process that are there, how much higher level oversight we would enjoy from various entities. And he was able to, I think, to help guide the activities of this advisory group to be ultimately the most helpful to NOAA and the National Weather Service.

They took on some really pretty tremendous challenges on that time period. It seems funny to think about it now, but there were lots of concerns at the time. Would our radars be causing cancer with people? Did we have the right kind of coverage across the country? Were we taking the right development approaches? Was the Weather Service workforce supportive and engaged? What was the culture of that workforce? How well would they be able to adapt to change? So a range of things which involved public perceptions and feelings to very technical issues about the systems to large

¹ Study Director of the National Weather Service Modernization Committee from 1989 until his retirement in 1994. Afterwards, he was a consultant/volunteer for the Committee and its various panels until the Study ended in 1999.

² Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System.

organizational changes. So we really asked quite a few things from that Committee. As really the first level Executive Manager of a Program there, I was very much in a position of the programs being subject to quite a bit of fairly harsh criticism from external bodies, whether it would be the General Accounting Office or the Inspector General, and also getting reports from this Academy Group. And I think that what impressed me so much is how helpful the work from the Academy was to the Weather Service and to NOAA and to me personally. And I know that was really because of Dave, and very much his sensitivity to what would be helpful, and would ultimately allow forward progress on this. He, I think in a masterful way, used all of his depth of expertise from what he had done in NOAA, and was able to really bring that to bear with very specific recommendations³, working through the Committee, to be very helpful to the National Weather Service.

On a personal level, Dave also made himself available to me for mentoring. He was somebody that could put his hand on your shoulder, and tell you it was going to get better, and that “this too would pass”, which you need to hear at particular times. And it meant so much coming from somebody whom you trusted that they know that things would, in fact, get better in going forward. Those are some of the memories that I have.

In going a little bit further, it was such a nice atmosphere that was created. We had a chance in the evenings to reflect and talk about the day’s activities when the committees were meeting.

Dave had pulled together on the committee, really, stars of the atmospheric community that were willing to give their time and attention to the challenges that we had in the Weather Service, and just really a very positive experience. I am confident that the modernization would not have gone as well, if that Committee had not acted as effectively as it did.

D. Grimes: When did you last work with Dave?

M. Glackin: I last worked with Dave in the 1997 timeframe, around that period of time as we were wrapping up some of the key work (97-98). So we had successfully developed the AWIPS System, and we were getting ready to deploy that nationwide. So that was the last piece of the modernization to come together, and I think it worked very well.

³ Selected publications from the Committee:

Toward a New National Weather Service: A First Report. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1991, 67pp.

Toward a New National Weather Service: A Second Report. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1992, 78pp.

Toward a New National Weather Service: Review of Modernization Criteria. Washington DC, National Academy Press, 1993, 86pp.

Weather For Those Who Fly. Washington DC, National Academy Press, 1994, 100pp.

[Review of the Draft Plan for the Modernization and Associated Restructuring Demonstration](#). Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999, 18 pp

[A Vision for the National Weather Service: Road Map for the Future](#), Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999. 76 pp.