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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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July 25, 2018

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

Dear Acting Under Secretary Gallaudet:

I write to bring to your attention a recent tragic weather event in North Dakota, and to urge that you work to study and resolve gaps in the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Doppler Radar coverage, including those in western North Dakota. Thank you for your consideration to this matter.


As you may be aware, shortly before 1:00 AM on July 10, 2018, a tornado with wind speeds of up to 127 miles per hour touched down in Watford City, North Dakota. Later gauged at level EF2, the tornado destroyed 122 RVs and 39 vehicles, and damaged another 120 RVs and 79 vehicles. Nine residents suffered serious injuries and tragically, a week-old baby boy, Blake Maguire, lost his life.

To make matters worse, these North Dakotans did not receive an adequate warning to take shelter from the tornado. The National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm warning for Watford City around midnight, but was unable to issue a tornado warning. The tornado touched down at 12:45 AM and the local Sheriff's Department was not made aware of the situation until 2 minutes later when they received a 911 call. The tornado was on the ground for a total of four minutes.

Watford City and most of the western North Dakota border are located in a gap in NOAA's Doppler Radar (NEXRAD) coverage, as represented by the red dot in the agency's map, attached to this letter. This gap in coverage prevents a large area of my state from receiving sufficient warning in advance of tornados, as the nearest radar stations are located too far away to detect severe weather in this area below 10,000 feet.

In April 2017, the president signed into law the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act (Public Law 115-25). Section 414 of this law requires NOAA to conduct a study on gaps in NEXRAD coverage and provide Congress with recommendations to address such gaps. Watford City and the rest of western North Dakota undoubtedly meet the criteria laid out in the law, and therefore I request this area be included in the study.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. I expect NOAA to act with urgency and I look forward to your response so that we can prevent and better prepare citizens for dangerous weather events like the recent tornado that tragically took a life and caused significant damage in my home state.

Sincerely,  
  
John Hoeven  
U.S. Senator

## NEXRAD Coverage Below 10,000 Feet AGL

