



THE WEATHER
COALITION

9 July 2004

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The Honorable Vernon Ehlers
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment, Standards, and Technology
Committee on Science
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Ehlers:

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Act (H.R. 4546) on behalf of the Weather Coalition, and would like to express support for much of the content of the current draft version of the bill. The Weather Coalition comprises a diverse group of representatives from industry, academia, science and education consortia and a national laboratory (see attached membership list). We are committed to work together to improve the capabilities of the country's weather prediction and warning capabilities.

The Coalition takes an active interest in NOAA and its research activities – those supported by the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) and the various NOAA line offices – and strongly supports the efforts of you and your colleagues to modernize and improve NOAA through this legislation. We believe that the enactment of a NOAA Organic Act at this time would help to both define and refine the mission and function of this agency in light of recent reports from various external advisory bodies.

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Science and Technology

We enthusiastically support the bill's establishment of a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Science and Technology and applaud the authority given this person to coordinate research and development budgets. Such a position would provide the leadership necessary to establish clear NOAA-wide research priorities, organize, and coordinate research endeavors, and give NOAA science and technology a more unified voice in the budget process. We also see an opportunity in these provisions to establish a central point of contact in NOAA for the nongovernmental research community, thus improving and streamlining NOAA's interaction with the broad scientific community. In order to accomplish this, we suggest that a provision be added to the bill that calls on this Deputy Assistant Secretary to serve as a liaison to the external science and technology community and to look for ways to expand the coordination of NOAA research and development efforts with the external scientific community. Given the manner in which the duties of this position are described in the Act, more definition of the OAR role and structure (as discussed below) would be of help in creating an effective and efficient work environment for this new position.

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Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research

We strongly encourage the Committee to include language that would explicitly recognize the strategic role that the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR) should play in conducting and supporting research that will better enable NOAA to carry out its mission and functions. We encourage you to include a section on OAR that would mirror the section provided on the National Weather Service (NWS). There has been much debate and discussion recently about the role of research in NOAA. We find that the Organic Act could be much stronger on this issue and play a defining role in enhancing and clarifying the organizational structure for NOAA research and the importance of NOAA's research portfolio emphasizing the critical nature of basic research as a foundation on which to build an applied research program.

Partnerships and Collaboration with External Entities

Little is stated in the draft bill about the importance of university and private sector partnerships in the accomplishment of the overall NOAA mission. ***Increasing external collaborations and meaningful partnerships between NOAA and the university and private sector communities are one of the highest priorities of the Weather Coalition.*** The academic community is an essential collaborator in NOAA education, research, research applications, and outreach efforts. The private sector is especially critical in research applications work and the provision of weather-and climate-related information to consumers at all levels. Mechanisms to sustain, leverage, and enhance the relationships between NOAA and these sectors should be stated explicitly in the Act. Regarding key university collaborations with NOAA, the Administrator's authority to establish cooperative research institutes on campuses should be noted in the language of the bill.

The Weather Coalition also supports the provisions specifically requiring NOAA research programs to support "extramural peer-reviewed competitive grant programs to assist the Administration in performing the functions described in this subsection." [Sec. 107. (b)(9)] Coalition members believe that increased collaboration, partnering, and competition among researchers – both those in federal agencies and those outside federal service – will greatly improve the quality and utility of NOAA research activities. Enhanced extramural research funding will give NOAA access to a wider variety of ideas, knowledge and expertise available through the private and academic sectors. We are confident that with a meaningful extramural competitive grants research program, not only will the quality of the research improve, but the transfer of research results and the education and training of the technical workforce needed for NOAA's mission will also improve. The preliminary report of NOAA's Research Review Team made a similar point in its discussion of extramural research within NOAA. As a result, the Coalition is highly supportive of the language in H.R. 4546 calling on the U.S. Weather Research Program (USWRP) to reserve at least 50% of the funds for the USWRP to support competitive, merit-based research proposals. We ask that language be added stating that the private sector is eligible to compete for these grants.

While Coalition members believe the USWRP provision promoting extramural research at NOAA is a step in the right direction, we are concerned that, based on past funding trends for the USWRP, the amount likely to be available for this extramural effort will fall far below what is needed. We call on the Committee consider the authorization for a Collaborations Fund dedicated entirely towards fostering partnerships with the academic and private sector communities in the area of weather

research. We suggest that this fund start at the level of \$20 million annually, with a potential for growth. Compared to the size of NOAA's entire research enterprise, this would be a relatively modest investment with the potential to yield a large scientific payoff.

Supporting the goals of NOAA's strategic plan, *New Priorities for the 21st Century*, the Collaborations Fund will promote goal-oriented interaction between NOAA and the university and private sector communities, thereby accelerating contributions made toward economic security, citizen safety, and protection of property through much-improved weather monitoring and forecasts. Specifically, the Collaborations Fund will enable NOAA to access the expertise of the broad atmospheric sciences community to achieve the following strategies and measures of success as delineated by the strategic plan:

- Increased number of modeling advances by government and academia demonstrated to improve the NOAA operational prediction suite
- Shortened cycle times from research to operations
- Improved accuracy of weather and air quality prediction models
- Increased number of new research findings and progress toward implementation in NOAA operations

Education and Training

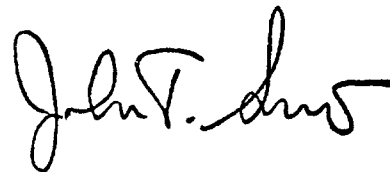
Finally, the Coalition takes seriously the responsibilities of one of its members, the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR), in the education and training of future professionals in fields related to weather, users of weather data, and the public in general. For this reason, we recommend adding to the list of functions of the National Weather Service (NWS) contained in Sec. 105, language that would include, "the education and training of the NWS workforce, users of weather forecasts, and the general public about weather, water, and climate issues."

In closing, we would like to thank you on behalf of the Weather Coalition members for your efforts to improve research and science at NOAA. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to move H.R. 4546 through the legislative process.

Sincerely,



Ray J. Ban
Executive Vice President
The Weather Channel



John T. Snow
Director, Oklahoma Weather Center
and Dean, College of Geosciences at
The University of Oklahoma

Co-Chairs of the Weather Coalition