



THE WEATHER
COALITION

July 5, 2005

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The Honorable Ted Stevens
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
SD-508 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

FASCIMILE: (202) 228-5769

Dear Mr. Chairman:

With this letter, we provide comments on the National Weather Service Duties Act of 2005 (S. 786) on behalf of the Weather Coalition, a diverse group of representatives from industry, academia, and scientific associations (list attached). Weather Coalition members are committed to working together with the Public Sector, especially the National Weather Service (NWS), to improve the capabilities of our nation's weather observing, prediction, and warning services, i.e., the weather enterprise. We believe that enactment of S. 786 would not benefit either taxpayers or the nation's weather enterprise. Rather than focusing on ways to restrict the NWS, we urge Congress to find ways to encourage all in the enterprise to work cooperatively to leverage the skills and competencies of all three sectors.

Our nation's weather enterprise would be poorly served by restricting the NWS from providing services that enhance the safety, efficiency, and productivity of Americans every day. For example, this bill seriously impacts NWS's role in providing weather forecasts to the nation if that forecast is not associated with severe weather. To produce a severe weather warning, however, the NWS must continually monitor the atmosphere and routinely generate forecasts of future weather. The bill seems to require that the NWS use public funds to generate forecasts which it must then conceal from the public, setting a troubling precedent for how publicly financed information is disseminated. With the exceptions of sensitive intelligence, homeland security, and defense data, we can think of no other sector in which the public is routinely barred access to information produced with their tax dollars.

In addition, many educators use NWS archived, as well as real-time, weather data and forecasts as part of their teaching. University and Private Sector researchers often use NWS data and forecasts in their search for better understanding of the weather. If these data are kept under lock and key, educators and researchers will be denied a valuable tool with which to educate future citizens, prepare the next generation of scientists, and develop new techniques for improving the science.

Private sector weather services are critical to a robust national weather enterprise. Commercial forecasting groups provide specialized forecasts for a significant number of markets contributing to our nation's GNP, such as those for the media, aviation,

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marine, rail and financial industries, and furnish customers with detailed interpretations and services based on NWS data. The NWS has neither the mission nor the resources to serve these functions. Rather than attempt to restrict what the National Weather Service does, as is the case with S. 786, Congress should charge the NWS with collaborating closely with and fostering the growth of the broad weather enterprise including the academic research community and private sector weather services. Such a charge would be fully in keeping with the vision and mission of the NWS's parent agency, the U.S. Department of Commerce, for promoting innovation and expanding the nation's economy.

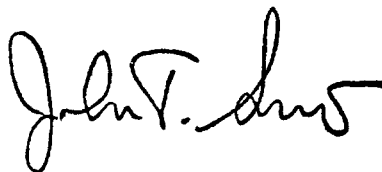
We urge Congress to develop a legislative alternative to S. 786 that will continue to encourage productive collaboration between the public, private, and academic sectors in the area of weather R&D and forecasting. If done well, the public will be served effectively; the federal government will perform its critical mission paid for by the taxpayers, and the public and economic markets of our nation will benefit from a vibrant private sector.

The Weather Coalition appreciates the opportunity to convey these views.

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

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