THE WEATHER COALITION

May 24, 2007

Honorable Bart Gordon, Chairman
Honorable Ralph Hall, Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Science and Technology
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Delivered via Fax

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Hall:

In May of this year H.R. 2407 was introduced by Representative Alcee Hastings for himself and several other House Members that would establish a National Hurricane Research Initiative and authorize necessary funding, consistent with the recent report by the National Science Board titled, *Hurricane Warning: the Critical Need for a National Hurricane Research Initiative*. On behalf of the members of the Weather Coalition – a diverse group of representatives from America's weather industry, academia, science and education consortia, and a national laboratory, committed to working together to improve the capabilities of the country's weather prediction and warning capabilities – we wish to offer our strong support for this legislation and stand ready to assist the committee in its consideration of this important legislation.

The reason we are supporting this legislation relates to the Nation's vulnerability to the damages that stem from hurricanes on many levels and the pressing national need for research that will lead to improved understanding and hurricane predictive tools to mitigate these impacts. Among weather hazards, hurricanes and tropical storms account for nearly half of the total damage sustained each year in the United States. Hurricane-induced economic losses have increased steadily in the U.S. during the past 50 years, with estimated annual total losses (in constant 2006 dollars) averaging $1.3 billion from 1949-1989, $10.1 billion from 1990-1995, and $35.8 billion per year from 2000 to 2005. The 2005 season was exceptionally destructive, with Hurricane Katrina pushing annual damage loss over the $100 billion mark for the first time since records began. Added to this financial cost is the loss of life associated with hurricanes and tropical storms – 196 individuals in the United States perished from 1986-1995 and approximately 1,450 were lost in the past 2 years alone.

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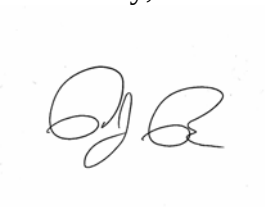
To place the Nation's vulnerability to hurricanes and tropical storms in perspective, 50 percent of the U.S. population lives within 50 miles of a coastline. The physical infrastructure in coastal regions has grown dramatically over the past few decades and in the late 1990's was worth about $3 trillion in the Gulf and Atlantic regions alone. Trillions of dollars in new seaboard infrastructure investment are expected over the next several decades. As our economy grows and the value of built infrastructure continues to increase, the economic and societal impacts of hurricanes and tropical storms also can be expected to escalate. Although not all coastal regions are directly vulnerable to hurricanes and tropical storms, impacts from those regions that are affected can have national consequences, for example, via increased fuel prices and displaced residents. Additionally, even though decaying tropical storms are an important source of fresh water for inland regions, associated flooding – sometimes occurring hundreds of miles from the coast and days after storm landfall – can be astonishingly destructive. Destructive and deadly tornadoes also frequently accompany hurricanes, creating further potential for economic losses and loss of life.

Despite advances made during the past decade in meteorological understanding and prediction of hurricanes, we still know relatively little about some of their most important aspects from an integrative perspective, including their internal dynamics and interactions with the larger-scale atmosphere and ocean; methods for quantifying and conveying uncertainty and mitigating hurricane impacts; associated short and long-term consequences on both natural and built environments; and the manner in which society responds before, during, and after landfall.

Billions of tax dollars have been provided for rescue, recovery, and rebuilding after hurricanes strike. Also important, however, is a national investment in the creation of new knowledge, and more effective application of existing knowledge by both public and private entities to reduce the enormous economic outlays, loss of life, and the associated societal disruption caused by hurricanes and tropical storms.

We hope the Committee will act favorably on this important legislation and we stand ready to assist the Committee as appropriate. Thank you for the opportunity to submit these views.

Sincerely,



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