



THE WEATHER
COALITION

May 3, 2005

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The Honorable Vernon Ehlers
Chairman
Subcommittee on Environment, Standards, and Technology
Committee on Science
U.S. 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. 50) on behalf of the Weather Coalition. The Weather Coalition comprises a diverse group of representatives (list attached) from industry, academia, science and education consortia and a national laboratory. We are committed to working together to improve the capabilities of the country's weather prediction and warning capabilities and therefore take an active interest in NOAA's research and research-into-operations activities.

We strongly support this effort to provide an Organic Act for NOAA. When enacted, an Organic Act will formalize and legitimize the many activities of the agency required to execute its critical mission on behalf of the nation. We would like to comment on the following content of the Act:

Administration Leadership [Sec. 4]

The academic community is an essential collaborator in NOAA education, 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. We believe that NOAA should do more to effectively utilize university and private sector partnerships in the accomplishment of the overall NOAA mission. *Thus, we commend the authority given the Administrator to enter into cooperative agreements with commercial organizations and educational institutions [Sec. 4 (a)(4)], but believe that mechanisms to sustain, leverage, and enhance the advantageous relationships between NOAA and these sectors should be stated more explicitly throughout the Act. We ask that Congress encourage NOAA to develop these mechanisms to strengthen collaborations between NOAA and the private and academic sectors. Further, we suggest that the NOAA mission should more strongly reflect that of its parent organization, so that the Agency works to "create the conditions for economic growth and opportunity by promoting innovation, entrepreneurship, competitiveness, and stewardship," especially in those areas of research and commerce that are closely linked to the Agency's activities.*

Deputy Assistant Secretary for Science, Technology, Education and Outreach

We support the bill's establishment of a Deputy Assistant Secretary for Science,

Technology, Education and Outreach [Sec. 4 (e)(1)] and applaud the authority given this person to coordinate research and development budgets as well as the agency's educational programs. 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. Unfortunately, funding for NOAA-sponsored research continues to decrease annually. We must reverse this trend if NOAA is to serve the nation at its most efficient and effective capacity.

We strongly support the Deputy Assistant Secretary being charged with developing "guidelines for peer review of science and technology research sponsored by the Administration." A well-run peer review program is essential to maintaining the quality and credibility of NOAA science.

We are also pleased to see that one of the functions of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Science, Technology, Education and Outreach will be to serve as a liaison to the nongovernmental science and technology community [Sec. 4 (e)(2)(f)]. Establishing a central point of contact in NOAA for the external community will streamline NOAA's interaction with the weather and climate enterprise and should facilitate involvement from nongovernmental experts – involvement that is critical to producing the best research and technological applications possible. Many of the most innovative advances in research and technology come from outside the public sector, and we believe that our nation's weather enterprise will be strongest when these results are integrated into NOAA's research and technology development process.

National Weather Service (NWS) [Sec. 5]

We believe that the National Weather Service's weather, water, climate, and space weather forecasts and warnings are critical to the efficiency, productivity, and national security of our nation as well as the safety of our citizens. *The NWS mission, goals, and functions as outlined in the bill are appropriate to federal government responsibilities.* However, we believe that there are ways in which involvement from the private and academic sectors can enhance the performance of and the critical services delivered by the NWS and other NOAA elements such as NESDIS. We are therefore pleased to see that the language concerning Public-Private Partnerships [Sec. 5 (e)] is included. *We believe that the language should be extended to include all of NOAA and further state that the external community should be involved in offering input and comment on the report that is to be developed by the Secretary.*

Research and Education [Sec. 7]

The Weather Coalition 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. 7 (b)(9)]. As stated above, funding for NOAA sponsored research continues to decrease annually. This can only weaken NOAA research and, in turn, NOAA technology development and operations. Coalition members believe that increased collaboration, partnering, and fair and open competition among researchers – both those in federal agencies and those outside federal service – will greatly improve the quality and utility of NOAA research activities. *We support the language included in this section, and urge the*

Committee to do everything possible to work with the Appropriations Committee to ensure that an extramural peer-reviewed competitive grant program continues to exist at NOAA and is enhanced to become far more significant than it is at present.

Science Advisory Board (SAB) [Sec. 8]

We applaud the inclusion of the Science Advisory Board section in the bill. This board provides necessary input directly to the NOAA Administrator to ensure that NOAA science programs are of the highest quality. *In order that the SAB has the utmost credibility and authority, we believe that appointments should be made at the highest level possible and that this should be stated in this section.*

Reports [Sec. 9]

We support the bill's requirement that the Administrator's report on NOAA's environmental data and information systems [Sec. 9 (a)] be reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) [Sec. 9 (a)(2)] and that the Strategic Plan for Scientific Research [Sec. 9 (b)] also be reviewed by the NAS [Sec. 9 (b)(2)]. The expertise that NAS reviewers will bring to these important documents will be of great benefit. Of equal importance is the bill's inclusion of input on the Strategic Plan for Scientific Research from external stakeholders at all levels [Sec. 9 (b)(A)]. As stated above, external expertise will enable NOAA to serve the nation at maximum capacity.

Transition [Sec. 12]

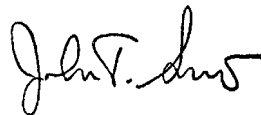
We appreciate and support the stated involvement of the external community in reorganization plan consultation.

In closing, we would like to thank you on behalf of the Weather Coalition members for your efforts to create an Organic Act for NOAA. Such a bill is long overdue. We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to move H.R. 50 through the legislative process.

Sincerely,



Raymond 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

Enclosure