

STATEMENT

Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)
Committee on Science, Space and Technology

H.R. 1561, Weather Forecasting Improvement Act
Full Committee Markup

March 25, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to join my colleague, Mr. Lucas, in asking for the Committee's support of H.R. 1561, which we have worked on together and I am proud to cosponsor. This bill represents a bipartisan agreement built on extensive advice from the weather community.

This committee approved a very similar piece of legislation in the last Congress under the leadership of then-Environment Subcommittee Chairman Chris Stewart and current Chairman Jim Bridenstine. That was a very good bill, and I am pleased that we have continued our bipartisan work to bring forward an even stronger compromise.

In the previous version, the Committee established a wide range of programs and processes designed to make the Office of Atmospheric Research and the National Weather Service work together in new ways. We wanted to see NWS and OAR learn from an approach that the Department of Defense has adopted, where practical research is informed by the experiences of those who will use the technology. It should be the same at NOAA so that, beyond basic research, researchers need buy-in from the forecasters for advance applications.

The closer collaboration between researchers and forecasters should result in greater safety for more Americans through faster innovations in forecasting tools.

That was a good bill, but the legislation before us is better.

First, we have made explicit that our priorities with this bill are limited to making sure that NOAA gets the best bang for their buck within weather research.

Second, the bill before us today also reflects a more thoughtful process moving toward commercial satellites for weather data, and includes a Pilot Program for NOAA to buy data from space-based commercial providers as a "proof of concept". The program is funding at a very reasonable level, nine million dollars. The performance of this Pilot will inform our efforts on how to move toward the next generation of weather satellite systems.

The bill also reestablishes the Mark Trail Award. This award is given out to organizations and individuals--heroes really--who have relied upon a warning issued through NOAA Weather Radio "All Hazards Network" to save the lives of others.

As many Members already know, NOAA runs a radio network of more than 970 transmitters covering all 50 states. Many manufacturers make receivers, and now smart phone apps, that can receive warnings from NOAA. This system has saved countless lives, especially in regions of the country that face severe weather, and the Mark Trail Award is a very low-cost way to draw attention to this important public service.

As we have been reminded often when crafting this legislation, weather is an area where critical public service is closely linked to significant innovation and economic development.

Throughout the bill, we aim to forge stronger relations within NOAA, stronger relations between NOAA and the research community, and more interaction between NOAA and the business community.

A multi-billion dollar market has emerged that is built on the specialized needs of economic sectors for targeted weather forecasts. That entire market exists because NOAA makes all of its data products available for free. This practice spurs innovation and creates jobs and profits. This bill maintains this practice, but I know we can do even more in this area and I will speak more to that later this morning.

The bill before us today is designed to improve public safety, enhance the American economy, and transform the innovation culture at NOAA.

I am confident that its passage will improve weather forecasting and tangibly benefit our constituents.

I am grateful that we are once again moving this legislation forward, and very much appreciate the courteous and reasoned way we have negotiated; however, it is my job, Mr. Chairman, to remind this committee that this good bill might be better still if we had followed regular order with hearings and a Subcommittee markup.

A lot has changed in the world of weather research and policy since we held hearings on this bill in the last Congress. There may be good ideas that we would have included in this legislation if we had taken just a little more time before coming together at Full Committee.

Nevertheless, I am happy to work with you on this and glad to be an original cosponsor with my friend, Mr. Lucas.

Finally, I want to thank the hard-working staff on both sides of the aisle who have devoted hours to helping us craft the good bipartisan legislation we have today.

I yield back.