



THE
ATMOSPHERIC RESERVOIR
Examining the Atmosphere and Atmospheric Resource Management

Senate Committee passes Weather Modification Research Bill

By Darin Langerud

The U.S. Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee approved S.517, the Weather Modification Research and Technology Transfer Act of 2005, by voice vote on November 17. In its deliberations, the committee also adopted a substitute amendment, offered by Senator Hutchison, establishing the short title of the bill as the "Weather Modification Research and Development Policy Authorization Act of 2005," which states that the bill's purpose is to develop a comprehensive national weather modification research policy.

If enacted, the bill would create a weather modification subcommittee in the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) which would advise Congress on a national weather modification research program. The subcommittee would be comprised of representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and other appropriate federal agencies.

The subcommittee would be required to prepare and submit a plan for weather modification research to Congress within 180 days of the enactment of the bill. The plan would include setting goals and priorities for research, methods through which to apportion funding, coordination with existing weather modification activities, and estimate the funding

required to carry out the plan.

The bill would also establish a Weather Modification Research Advisory Board which would advise and make recommendations to the subcommittee. The board would consist of nine members, each with a field of expertise in atmospheric science or civil engineering relevant to weather modification and appointed by the Director of OSTP. At least one member of the board must be from a state organization that is currently supporting operational weather modification projects, such as the Atmospheric Resource Board.

The Senate subcommittee heard testimony on the bill at a hearing on November 10. In his testimony, Dr. Joseph Golden, former director of the Federal/State Atmospheric Modification Research Program stated that "The scientific foundation and underlying physics in purposeful weather modification, i.e., cloud seeding, is sound and well-established. We now have both the science and technology to launch a new research attack on some of these other vexing (severe weather) problems."

Similar sentiments were stated by Dr. Michael Garstang, Chairman of a National Research Council committee which recently issued a report on the status of weather modification. "If you simultaneously, with this coherent program, brought to bear on it (weather modification) all of the technological advances that have occurred in the last 30 years there would be immediate and tremendous

advances," Garstang said during the hearing.

"There is a growing demand for fresh water, and the increasing levels of damage and loss from severe weather would indicate that we should be researching what we can do to mitigate damage and also provide a more steady, even, and balanced source of fresh water," said bill sponsor, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-TX. "I think it's very important that we pursue this research, which is why I introduced this legislation."

A companion bill, sponsored by Rep. Mark Udall, D-CO, has yet to have a hearing in the House Science committee. The bill, H.R.2995, is very similar to the original version of S.517.

S.517 now proceeds to the full Senate for its consideration. The Atmospheric Resource Board ardently supports both S.517 and H.R.2995, as demonstrated by a resolution of support passed unanimously at its July 14 meeting. Congressional consideration of these bills, and the issues of weather modification and weather damage mitigation, is an encouraging step.

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