

Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act passes the Senate

May 2, 2017

The Senate passed a major bill related to space weather research on May 2. The bill, entitled the Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act (S.141), develops an integrated strategy for the coordination of federal government activities to improve the nation's ability to prepare for, mitigate, and respond to the impacts of space weather events.

The term "space weather" refers to any conditions and events on the sun, in the solar wind, and in our upper atmosphere or near-Earth space that can affect conditions on the Earth, thus affecting human life. These solar and geophysical events can cause irreparable damages to the power grid and technology.

S.141 outlines an integrated strategy for interagency coordination necessary to implement many aspects of the National Space Weather Strategy and National Space Weather Action Plan released in 2015 by the Obama Administration. The bill establishes a Space Weather Interagency Working Group, and highlights the vital importance of federally-funded space weather research and forecasting. It directs the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), in coordination with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Department of Defense (DOD), to develop a strategy for solar and solar wind observations that considers measurements beyond the lifetime of our current assets.

The bill directs NSF, NASA, and DOD to continue carrying out basic research activities on heliophysics, geospace science, and space weather, and to support competitive, merit-based, peer-reviewed proposals for research and monitoring of space weather and its impacts. The bill also directs NOAA to inform the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) about space weather hazards to protect the nation's critical infrastructure.

The bill was received in the House of Representative and referred to the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence on May 3.

Sources: Library of Congress, National Aeronautics and Space Administration, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
