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## Senate passes bill to improve national volcano early warning and monitoring capabilities

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On May 17, the Senate unanimously passed the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System Act (S.346), sponsored by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK). The bill establishes the National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System, under the authority of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), to modernize and unify the current U.S. volcano monitoring network, including a data center and a national volcano monitoring office that is operational twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. The bill authorizes \$55 million in funding for fiscal years (FY) 2019 through 2023 to implement this act, and includes provisions for an external grants program to fund research on volcano monitoring science and technology and authorizes collaborations with institutions of higher education and state agencies.

Amidst the widely-publicized volcanic unrest at Mount Kilauea in Hawaii, the passage of this bill by the Senate incidentally occurred on the same day as the first explosive eruption in Kilauea's current eruptive phase. Volcanic activity at Kilauea has been increasing since early May, and its associated volcanic hazards, including poisonous gases, lava flows, and explosive projectiles, have led to the evacuation of over two thousand people, the destruction of forty buildings, and multiple injuries.

Congress has also previously expressed concerns that systems and equipment used to monitor, detect, and warn the public of volcanic hazards are outdated and inadequate to address the degree of risk associated with volcanoes in the U.S. In January 2018, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources conducted a hearing to discuss the role of certain federal agencies in preparing for and responding to natural hazards, such as volcanoes, during which Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-WA) highlighted the five high- to very-high-threat volcanoes located in her home-state of Washington. Reflecting this need for improved volcano hazard resources, Congress increased the USGS budget for volcano hazard programs from \$28.1 million in FY 2017 to \$42.6 million in FY 2018.

In the House, Representative Don Young (R-AK-At Large) introduced an identical companion bill by the same name (H.R.4475), which the House Committee on Natural Resources considered at a legislative hearing and reported favorably back to the House for a vote by the full chamber.

*Sources: BBC; Library of Congress; U.S. Geological Survey.*

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