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On April 1, the House passed legislation authorizing increased funding for weather research at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Weather Forecasting Improvement Act of 2014 (H.R. 2413) would allocate \$360 million to NOAA over a two year period for “investment [in] near-term, affordable, and attainable advances in observational, computing, and modeling capabilities.” Improved modeling systems should improve NOAA and the National Weather Service’s ability to predict and track severe storms such as hurricanes and tornadoes.

American forecast modeling has fallen behind European capabilities in recent years. For example, the European model was able to provide more lead time for Superstorm Sandy than the U.S. counterpart, the Global Forecast System. Advanced weather forecasting capabilities are crucial for saving lives in severe weather events. Representative Jim Bridenstine (R-OK), the bill’s sponsor, suggested that investments in improving NOAA’s forecasting capabilities could increase lead time for tornadoes from 15 minutes to an hour, providing critical time for the public to seek shelter.

The bill gained bipartisan support after changing language that reallocated funds from climate change research to fund weather research, a move that Democrats strongly opposed. The revised language supplies funding for weather research without altering current climate funding.

Sources: Capital Weather Gang, E&E News

Updated 5/5/14
