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Home > House Science Committee moves forward with the Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act

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The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology held a full committee markup on July 24 to consider the Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act (S. 141), which passed the Senate by unanimous consent in May 2017.

Variations in space weather, caused primarily by changes in the charged particles emitted by the Sun, threaten the electrical power grid, telecommunication networks, and satellite and aircraft operations. S. 141 would direct the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) to coordinate interagency research and monitoring efforts to better understand space weather events. It would also require OSTP to work with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the Department of Defense (DOD), to develop sustainable observing, modeling, and forecasting capabilities.

During the House markup, committee members offered three amendments to the space weather bill—two of which were agreed upon by a voice vote. Representatives Ed Perlmutter (D-CO-7) and Mo Brooks (R-AL-5) introduced an amendment that designates the National Space Council as the coordinating force behind federal space weather activities, rather than OSTP. Additionally, their amendment requires collaboration with the private sector, adding that “the federal government should, as practicable, obtain space weather data and services through contracts with the commercial sector, when the data and services are available, cost-effective, and add value.” With this amendment, the bill would establish a pilot program through NOAA to reward up to \$6 million a year in contracts to commercial sector entities to determine the viability of obtaining commercial space weather data from these providers. Another amendment offered by Representative Perlmutter and agreed to by the committee adds language that emphasizes the need for space weather observation and forecasting for deep space exploration.

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30) was among a select few members on the committee who opposed the amendments due to their resulting differences to the Senate version of the bill. Ranking Member Johnson offered an amendment to replace the text of S. 141 with the Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act (H.R. 3086), which was sponsored by Representative Perlmutter in June 2017 and closely resembles the Senate’s space weather bill; however, the change was defeated by a vote of 19 to 13, with Representative Perlmutter voting against Ranking Member Johnson’s proposal to replace S. 141 with the text of his own bill.

Sources: Library of Congress; SpacePolicyOnline.com; U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology.
