



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement from Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Full Committee Markup

Chairman Smith: Today we meet to consider two bills primarily referred to the Science Committee.

One is S. 141, the "Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act." The committee will consider an amendment in the nature of a substitute by Rep. Perlmutter as base text.

The Perlmutter-Brooks substitute requires the establishment of roles and responsibilities for federal agencies within the nation's space weather enterprise. It codifies a formal approach to assessing and addressing the challenges posed by space weather in the areas of observation, forecasting, and response.

Broadly speaking, space weather is the way the behavior of the sun and the nature of the Earth's magnetic field and atmosphere interact. Space weather can affect the modern technology we rely upon daily.

The electric grid, oil pipelines, passengers on commercial airlines, and satellites that provide telecommunications and GPS services can all be impacted by space weather. Depending on the severity of the event, these impacts can prove disastrous. As with terrestrial weather, without thorough monitoring and accurate modeling, we simply have no good way to predict space weather events and, in turn, no ability to ensure that life and property are protected if severe events occur.

While the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the U.S. Air Force currently monitor space weather, issue forecasts, and create other products to inform the public, space weather science, as a discipline, is in its early stages.

Without marked improvements in understanding the causes of space weather, led by NASA, and the ability to more accurately forecast and predict events, much of our modern technological infrastructure is at risk.

The Perlmutter-Brooks substitute creates, for the first time, a formal national framework to leverage the capabilities and expertise of the government, commercial sector, academic community, and international partners.

By tasking the National Space Council with overseeing this framework, this amendment sets out a strategy that is consistent with the current Administration's approach to the management of space issues, and raises the profile of space weather and the serious threat it poses.

Additionally, this amendment codifies the reality of the threat posed by space weather and requires the establishment and maintenance of a baseline capability for space weather observation and forecasting.

However, through the creation of a pilot program for the purchase of space weather data and services from the commercial sector, the substitute also ensures that innovative, cost-effective strategies can be pursued. And our burgeoning commercial space industry can help address the challenges posed by space weather.

The Perlmutter-Brooks amendment will help us better prepare for, respond to, and recover from potential space weather events.

The other is H.R. 6468, the "Improving Science in Chemical Assessments Act," introduced by Environment Subcommittee Chairman Andy Biggs, and co-sponsored by Committee Vice Chairman Lucas, Environment Subcommittee Vice Chairman Norman, and Representatives Rohrabacher, Posey, Weber, Babin, Higgins, Lesko, Hultgren, Abraham, Webster, Marshall, and Dunn.

This legislation amends the Environmental Research, Development, and Demonstration Act to require any chemical hazard identification and dose response assessments previously conducted by the Integrated Risk Information System, or "IRIS" program, to be carried out by the relevant national program offices within the EPA.

Since 2009, the Government Accountability Office and the National Academy of Sciences have issued multiple reports criticizing the IRIS program for a lack of transparency, procedural flaws, and improper science.

This committee held a hearing last September examining many of these problems and learning more about their impact on industry. Committee staff have held two briefings with the EPA to learn more about the practices and procedures of the IRIS program.

Although much work has been done in recent years to address shortcomings in the program, the results just aren't there. The time is ripe for an overhaul to bring the chemical assessment process at EPA back to its core mission of conducting complete and transparent scientific research as the foundation for regulatory decisions. This bill does just that by making agency science more useful to EPA program offices while increasing transparency and efficiency in the conduct of chemical assessments.

H.R. 6468 requires the EPA to follow strict scientific standards in conducting hazard identification and dose response assessments. The bill requires the EPA to ensure the underlying scientific data is complete, relevant, and reproducible. It also explicitly requires the EPA to integrate all lines of scientific evidence, a suggestion made by the National Academies of Sciences in 2014.

The EPA Office of Research and Development must certify that each chemical assessment completed by the relevant program offices meets the scientific standards in the legislation.

Together, these improvements will increase the public's confidence in the EPA's chemical toxicity assessments by ensuring they are conducted using the best available science and are based on the weight of the evidence.

Taken together, the two bills we consider today prioritize key programs and vital reforms within the Science Committee's jurisdiction.

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