The U.S. Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee approved S.517, the Weather Modification Research and Technology Transfer Act of 2005, by voice vote on November 17. In its deliberations, the committee also adopted a substitute amendment, offered by Senator Hutchison, establishing the short title of the bill as the “Weather Modification Research and Development Policy Authorization Act of 2005,” which states that the bill’s purpose is to develop a comprehensive national weather modification research policy.

If enacted, the bill would create a weather modification subcommittee in the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) which would advise Congress on a national weather modification research program. The subcommittee would be comprised of representatives from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and other appropriate federal agencies.

The Senate subcommittee heard testimony on the bill at a hearing on November 10. In his testimony, Dr. Joseph Golden, former director of the Federal/State Atmospheric Modification Research Program stated that “The scientific foundation and underlying physics in purposeful weather modification, i.e., cloud seeding, is sound and well-established. We now have both the science and technology to launch a new research attack on some of these other vexing (severe weather) problems.”

The bill would also establish a Weather Modification Research Advisory Board which would advise and make recommendations to the subcommittee. The board would consist of nine members, each with a field of expertise in atmospheric science or civil engineering relevant to weather modification and appointed by the Director of OSTP. At least one member of the board must be from a state organization that is currently supporting operational weather modification projects, such as the Atmospheric Resource Board.

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Similar sentiments were stated by Dr. Michael Garstang, Chairman of a National Research Council committee which recently issued a report on the status of weather modification. “If you simultaneously, with this coherent program, brought to bear on it (weather modification) all of the technological advances that have occurred in the last 30 years there would be immediate and tremendous advances,” Garstang said during the hearing.

“This is growing demand for fresh water, and the increasing levels of damage and loss from severe weather would indicate that we should be researching what we can do to mitigate damage and also provide a more steady, even, and balanced source of fresh water,” said bill sponsor, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-TX. “I think it’s very important that we pursue this research, which is why I introduced this legislation.”

A companion bill, sponsored by Rep. Mark Udall, D-CO, has yet to have a hearing in the House Science committee. The bill, H.R.2995, is very similar to the original version of S.517.

S.517 now proceeds to the full Senate for its consideration. The Atmospheric Resource Board ardently supports both S.517 and H.R.2995, as demonstrated by a resolution of support passed unanimously at its July 14 meeting. Congressional consideration of these bills, and the issues of weather modification and weather damage mitigation, is an encouraging step.