

Senate to hold hearing on improving weather forecast communication

By **Jason Samenow** April 16, 2015

Extreme weather is costly. From 2008 to 2013, alone, the price tag of extreme weather events in the U.S. was \$309 billion. These costs are soaring even as forecasts improve. But an excellent weather forecast, if not properly communicated and acted upon, is of practically no value.

[\[Five myths about weather forecasting\]](#)

We can point to numerous recent events in which there were good forecasts but bad, costly decisions, including the so-called “Commutageddon” snowstorm in Washington, D.C. in January 2011 and the crippling snow event in Atlanta in 2014, both of which stranded motorists for hours.

[\[Commutageddon: could we all have done more?\]](#) | [\[Are meteorologists to blame for Atlanta snow disaster?\]](#)

Policymakers are increasingly recognizing the importance of an effective and seamless forecast-decisionmaking continuum. To inform future legislative efforts pertaining to improving weather forecasts and their communication, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation is convening a hearing next Wednesday entitled, “Weathering the Storm: How Can We Better Communicate Weather to Enhance Commerce and Safety?”

Four expert witnesses, representing broadcast meteorology, social science, emergency management, and information technology, will testify about how weather forecast information generated by the federal government is used by decisionmakers in the public and private sectors. Witnesses will also address the challenges and benefits of incorporating new technology as demands for weather information evolve.

Here is the list of witnesses:

- Dr. Jay Trobec, Chief Meteorologist, KELO-TV
- Mr. Ron Sznajder, Vice President, Cloud Services – Weather, Schneider Electric
- Dr. Kim Klockow, University Corporation for Atmospheric Research Postdoctoral Researcher, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, Office of Weather and Air

Quality

- Mr. Bryan Koon, Director of Emergency Management, State of Florida

The hearing precedes expected legislative activity in both the House of Representatives and Senate on weather forecast improvement. In the House, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology has passed the “[Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act of 2015](#)” which awaits a vote on the House floor.

[[Committee Passes Bipartisan Bill to Improve Weather Forecasting](#) (Republican release) | [Committee Passes Bipartisan Weather Research Bill](#) (Democrat release)]

The Senate Commerce Committee expects to take up related legislation later this year according to committee sources.

Next Wednesday’s hearing should stimulate excellent discussions between lawmakers and key constituents of the weather community. It represents a positive step towards implementing policies that increase our resilience to extreme weather events.

(The hearing will take place in the Senate Russell Office Building, Room 253, beginning at 10 a.m. on April 22.)

Jason is the Washington Post’s weather editor and Capital Weather Gang's chief meteorologist. He earned a master's degree in atmospheric science, and spent 10 years as a climate change science analyst for the U.S. government. He holds the Digital Seal of Approval from the National Weather Association.

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