

SUMMARY: The Tsunami Preparedness Act (S. 50)

as approved by the Senate Commerce Committee on March 10, 2005

Introduced by U.S. Senators Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii) and Ted Stevens (R-Alaska)

OVERVIEW

The bill authorizes the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to establish, operate, and maintain a dependable national tsunami warning system that would provide maximum tsunami detection capability for the nation. The system would build on the model established in the Pacific, and provide for its repair, expansion and modernization by the close of calendar year 2007.

The system would include four components: 1) an expanded and upgraded detection and warning system; 2) a federal-state tsunami hazard mitigation program; 3) a tsunami research program; and 4) a modernization and upgrade program. In addition, the bill would direct NOAA to provide any necessary technical or other assistance to international efforts to establish regional systems in other parts of the world, including the Indian Ocean.

Co-sponsors: Senators Olympia Snowe (R-Maine), John Kerry (D-Mass.), Conrad Burns (R-Mont.), Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.), Gordon Smith (R-Ore.), Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), Trent Lott (R-Miss.), Frank Lautenberg (D-N.J.), Ben Nelson (D-Neb.), Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), Hilary Clinton (D-N.Y.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), Mary Landrieu (D-Louis.), Saxby Chambliss (D-Georgia), Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Mark Dayton (D-Minn.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), Barbara Mikulski (D-Maryland), Paul Sarbanes (D-Maryland), Jon Corzine (D-N.J.), and Judd Gregg (R-N.H.).

KEY PROVISIONS

Improves Detection and Warning Capabilities: The detection and warning system established by the bill would cover the Pacific Ocean region, as well as the Atlantic-Caribbean-Gulf of Mexico region. The detection network would cover each of these regions and include deep ocean detection buoys, tide and water level gauges and a coordinated NOAA-USGS seismic detection network. The detection and warning network would also encompass tsunami warning centers to collect and analyze the data and distribute warnings, including the existing Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii and the West Coast/Alaska Tsunami Warning Center (WCATWC) in Alaska, as well as any others deemed necessary by the NOAA Administrator.

Establishes Community-based Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program: The bill also authorizes NOAA to establish a community-based tsunami hazard mitigation program to improve tsunami preparedness of at-risk areas. The bill establishes a Federal-State coordinating committee for this program, consisting of representatives from NOAA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the United States Geological Survey, the National Science Foundation, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and affected coastal states and territories. This program will improve inundation mapping, community outreach and education, and promote and integrate tsunami warning and mitigation measures, including rescue and recovery guidelines. The program would provide grants to states to ensure the program elements are implemented in coastal communities.

Enhances Tsunami-related Research: The bill requires NOAA to establish, along with other agencies and academic institutions, a tsunami research program to develop detection, prediction, communication, and mitigation science and technology to support tsunami forecasts and warnings. This program shall investigate, in consultation with the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information and the Federal Communications Commission, the potential for improved technologies for tsunami and other hazard warnings, including telephones, wireless and satellite technology, the Internet, television and radio, and any innovative combination of these technologies.

Requires Ongoing Upgrades, Maintenance of System: The bill requires NOAA to upgrade and modernize the U.S. tsunami detection system. NOAA is required to immediately repair, and ensure the deployment of existing deep ocean detection buoys and related components of the detection and warning system. In order to ensure the system is reliable and the Administration is accountable for long-term operability, NOAA is required to notify Congress upon any equipment or system failures that will impair regional detection, and of significant contractor failures or delays. These upgrades must be completed by December 31, 2007. In addition, the bill calls for the National Academy of Sciences to review the system for further modernization recommendations.

Instructs NOAA to Assist International Community: The bill requires NOAA, and the interagency coordinating committee of the U.S. Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program, to provide technical assistance and advice to international entities as part of an international effort to develop a fully functional global tsunami warning system.

Promotes Integration of Coastal Preparedness Programs: The bill directs NOAA to establish an integrated Coastal Community Vulnerability and Adaptation program, which would focus on a wide range of coastal hazards and encourage regional collaboration among federal, state, local, entities through a small suite of regional pilot projects. The projects would focus on a variety of issues, including development of vulnerability maps for all coastal hazards, better integration of risk management with community planning, leadership training for public officials, and new risk communication systems.

Authorizes Funding for the Act: The bill authorizes annual appropriations of \$35 million for fiscal years 2006-2012 to NOAA for the tsunami programs and \$5 million for fiscal years 2006-2012 for the coastal preparedness program to carry out the requirements of this act.