AMENDMENT NO. _______  Calendar No. _______

Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES—114th Cong., 1st Sess.

S. 1573

To improve communication from the National Weather Service regarding severe weather risks, and for other purposes.

Referred to the Committee on ______________ and ordered to be printed

Ordered to lie on the table and to be printed

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE intended to be proposed by Mr. THUNE (for himself and Mr. SCHATZ)

Viz:

1  Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

3  SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4  This Act may be cited as the “Weather Alerts for a Ready Nation Act of 2015”.

6  SEC. 2. WARNING COORDINATION METEOROLOGISTS AT WEATHER FORECAST OFFICES OF NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE.

9  (a) IN GENERAL.—The Director of the National Weather Service shall employ at least 1 warning coordina-
tion meteorologist at each weather forecast office of the National Weather Service.

(b) RESPONSIBILITIES.—Each warning coordination meteorologist employed under subsection (a) shall—

(1) be responsible for providing service to the geographic area of responsibility covered by the weather forecast office at which the warning coordination meteorologist is employed to help ensure that users of products of the National Weather Service can respond effectively to improve outcomes from weather events;

(2) liaise with users of products and services of the National Weather Service, such as the public, media outlets, users in the aviation, marine, and agricultural communities, and forestry, land, and water management interests, to evaluate the adequacy and usefulness of the products and services of the National Weather Service;

(3) collaborate with such weather forecast offices and State, local, and tribal government agencies as the Director considers appropriate in developing, proposing, and implementing plans to develop, modify, or tailor products and services of the National Weather Service to improve the usefulness of such products and services;
(4) ensure the maintenance and accuracy of severe weather call lists, appropriate office severe weather policy or procedures, and other severe weather or dissemination methodologies or strategies; and

(5) work closely with State, local, and tribal emergency management agencies, and other agencies related to disaster management, to ensure a planned, coordinated, and effective preparedness effort.

(e) ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES.—A warning coordination meteorologist employed under subsection (a) may—

(1) work with a State agency to develop plans for promoting more effective use of products and services of the National Weather Service throughout the State;

(2) identify priority community preparedness objectives;

(3) develop plans to meet the objectives identified in paragraph (2); and

(4) conduct severe weather event preparedness planning and citizen education efforts with and through various State, local, and tribal government
agencies and other disaster management-related organizations.

(d) Placement With State and Local Emergency Managers.—

(1) In general.—In carrying out this section, the Director may place a warning coordination meteorologist employed under subsection (a) with a State or local emergency manager if the Director considers doing so is necessary or convenient to carry out this section.

(2) Treatment.—If the Director determines that the placement of a warning coordination meteorologist placed with a State or local emergency manager under paragraph (1) is near a weather forecast office of the National Weather Service, such placement shall be treated as employment of the warning coordination meteorologist at such weather forecast office for purposes of subsection (a).

(e) Definition of State.—In this section, the term “State” means a State, a territory, or possession of the United States, including a Commonwealth, or the District of Columbia.
1 SEC. 3. IMPROVING NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION COMMUNICATION
OF HAZARDOUS WEATHER AND WATER EVENTS.

(a) PURPOSE OF SYSTEM.—For purposes of the assessment required by subsection (b)(1)(A), the purpose of the system of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for issuing watches and warnings regarding hazardous weather and water events shall be risk communication to the general public that informs action to prevent loss of life and property.

(b) ASSESSMENT OF SYSTEM.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 2 years after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shall—

(A) assess the system of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for issuing watches and warnings regarding hazardous weather and water events; and

(B) submit to Congress a report on the findings of the Administrator with respect to the assessment conducted under subparagraph (A).

(2) ELEMENTS.—The assessment required by paragraph (1)(A) shall include the following:
(A) An evaluation of whether the system of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for issuing watches and warnings regarding hazardous weather and water events meets the purpose described in subsection (a).

(B) Development of recommendations for—

(i) legislative and administrative action to improve the system described in such subparagraph; and

(ii) such research as the Administrator considers necessary to address the focus areas described in paragraph (3).

(3) Focus areas.—The assessment required by paragraph (1)(A) shall focus on the following:

(A) Ways to communicate the risks posed by hazardous weather or water events to the public that are most likely to result in action to mitigate the risk.

(B) Ways to communicate the risks posed by hazardous weather or water events to the public as broadly and rapidly as practicable.

(C) Ways to preserve the benefits of the existing watches and warnings system.
(D) Ways to maintain the utility of the watches and warnings system for Government and commercial users of the system.

(4) CONSULTATION.—In conducting the assessment required by paragraph (1)(A), the Administrator shall—

(A) consult with such line offices within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration as the Administrator considers relevant, including the National Ocean Service, the National Weather Service, and the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research;

(B) consult with individuals in the academic sector, including individuals in the field of social and behavioral sciences, and other weather services;

(C) consult with media outlets that will be distributing the watches and warnings;

(D) consult with non-Federal forecasters that produce alternate severe weather risk communication products;

(E) consult with emergency planners and responders, including State and local emergency management agencies, and other government users of the watches and warnings system, in-
including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Office of Personnel Management, the Coast Guard, and such other Federal agencies as the Administrator determines rely on watches and warnings for operational decisions; and

(F) make use of the services of the National Academy of Sciences, as the Administrator considers necessary and practicable, including contracting with the National Research Council to review the scientific and technical soundness of the assessment required by paragraph (1)(A), including the recommendations developed under paragraph (2)(B).

(5) METHODOLOGIES.—In conducting the assessment required by paragraph (1)(A), the Administrator shall use such methodologies as the Administrator considers are generally accepted by the weather enterprise, including social and behavioral sciences.

(c) IMPROVEMENTS TO SYSTEM.—

(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall, based on the assessment required by subsection (b)(1)(A), take such actions as the Administrator considers necessary—
(A) subject to paragraph (2), to improve the system of the Administration for issuing watches and warnings regarding hazardous weather and water events; and

(B) to support efforts to satisfy research needs to enable future improvements to such system.

(2) REQUIREMENTS REGARDING MAJOR CHANGES.—In carrying out paragraph (1)(A), the Administrator shall ensure that any change to the system described in such paragraph that the Administrator considers a major change—

(A) is validated by social and behavioral science using a generalizable sample;

(B) accounts for the needs of various demographics, vulnerable populations, and geographic regions;

(C) accounts for the differences between types of weather and water hazards;

(D) responds to the needs of Federal, State, and local government partners and media partners; and

(E) accounts for necessary changes to Federally-operated watch and warning propagation and dissemination infrastructure and protocols.
(3) **Annual Reports.**—Not later than the date that is 4 years after the date of the enactment of this Act and not less frequently than once each year thereafter until the Administrator determines that the actions required by paragraph (1) have been completed, the Administrator shall submit to Congress a report on the actions taken by the Administrator pursuant to such paragraph.

(4) **Final Report.**—Not later than the date that the Administrator determines that the actions required by paragraph (1) have been completed, the Administrator shall submit to Congress a report that summarizes all of the actions taken by the Administrator pursuant to paragraph (1).

(d) **Watches and Warnings Defined.**—

(1) **In General.**—Except as provided in paragraph (2), in this section, the term “watch” and “warning”, with respect to a hazardous weather and water event, means a product issued by the Administration, intended for consumption by the general public, to alert the general public to the potential for or presence of the event and to inform action to prevent loss of life and property.

(2) **Exception.**—In this section, the term “watch” and “warning” do not include technical or
specialized meteorological and hydrological forecasts, outlooks, or model guidance products.

SEC. 4. REPORT ON CONTRACT POSITIONS AT NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE.

(a) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shall submit to Congress a report on the use of contractors at the National Weather Service for the most recently completed fiscal year.

(b) CONTENTS.—The report required by subsection (a) shall include, with respect to the most recently completed fiscal year, the following:

(1) The total number of full-time equivalent employees at the National Weather Service, disaggregated by each equivalent level of the General Schedule.

(2) The total number of full-time equivalent contractors at the National Weather Service, disaggregated by each equivalent level of the General Schedule that most closely approximates their duties.

(3) The total number of vacant positions at the National Weather Service on the day before the date
of the enactment of this Act, disaggregated by each
equivalent level of the General Schedule.

(4) The 5 most common positions filled by full-
time equivalent contractors at the National Weather
Service and equivalent level of the General Schedule
that most closely approximates the duties of such
positions.

(5) Of the positions identified in paragraph (4),
the percentage of full-time equivalent contractors in
those positions that have held a prior position at the
National Weather Service or another entity in the
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

(6) The average full-time equivalent salary for
Federal employees at the National Weather Service
for each equivalent level of the General Schedule.

(7) The average salary for full-time equivalent
contractors performing at each equivalent level of
the General Schedule at the National Weather Serv-
vice.

(8) A description of any actions taken by the
Administrator to respond to the issues raised by the
Inspector General of the Department of Commerce
regarding the hiring of former National Oceanic and
Atmospheric Administration employees as contra-
tors at the National Weather Service, such as the

(c) ANNUAL PUBLICATION.—For each fiscal year after the fiscal year covered by the report required by subsection (a), the Administrator shall, not later than 180 days after the completion of the fiscal year, publish on a publicly accessible Internet website the information described in paragraphs (1) through (6) of subsection (b) for such fiscal year.