

Testimony of Mr. Scott Sternberg
President, Vaisala, Inc.
Louisville, Colorado
Before the
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today as a witness in support of a strong and vibrant National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

My name is Scott Sternberg and I am the President of Vaisala, Inc. Vaisala is a global leader in environmental and industrial measurement. Building on more than 70 years of experience, Vaisala contributes to a better quality of life by providing a comprehensive range of innovative observation and measurement products and services for meteorology, weather critical operations and controlled environments. Vaisala employs over 1400 professionals worldwide and 350 in the U.S.

I am appearing today as both President of Vaisala, Inc. and as a member of the Friends of NOAA Coalition. The Friends of NOAA are supporters, stakeholders and partners of NOAA that educate and inform interested audiences about the full range of NOAA activities so that the agency can carry out its responsibilities relative to our oceans and coasts, fisheries, weather, and climate.

NOAA is one of the premier science-based agencies in the Federal Government, providing decision makers with critically important data, products and services that promote and enhance the nation's economy, jobs, security, environment, and quality of life. For example, it was NOAA, and their partners in the weather enterprise that enabled the delivery of accurate and timely information regarding the impending landfall of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This one set of weather forecasts alone literally saved tens of thousands of lives.

Vaisala strongly supports the funding requested by the Administration for NOAA in FY 2012. The \$5.5 billion budget request for NOAA falls short of what is truly needed by NOAA to carry out its important missions but we also appreciate that federal spending must be restrained as part of a broader effort to put this Nation's fiscal house in order.

With fiscal restraint in mind, I appreciate the difficulty this Subcommittee faces in terms of allocating very scarce public resources among and between important yet very different programs under your jurisdiction. Deciding between law enforcement, the space program, and the census bureau, for example, seems to be impossibly difficult. Yet, on the matter of NOAA – let me suggest by using the weather enterprise as an example, the kinds of costs or expenses we as a society might be able to avoid, if we adequately supported NOAA.

A recent report by the National Academy of Sciences entitled, *When Weather Matters*, says the goal of weather prediction is to provide information to people and organizations that can be used to reduce weather-related losses and enhance societal benefits. In economic terms, the benefit of the investment in public weather forecasts and warnings is substantial: the estimated annualized benefit to the public is about \$31.5 billion, compared to the \$5.1 billion cost of generating the information; this estimate does not include the comparable benefits to government and industry.

Between 1980 and 2009, 96 weather disasters in the U.S. caused at least \$1 billion in damages, with total losses exceeding \$700 billion. Between 1999 and 2008, there was an average of 629 direct weather fatalities per year. The annual impact of adverse weather on the national highway system is staggering: 1.5 million weather-related crashes with 7,400 deaths, more than 700,000 injuries, and \$42 billion in economic losses. In addition, \$4.2 billion is lost each year as a result of weather-related air traffic delays.

Better forecasts and warnings can and do reduce these numbers, but much more can be done. The past 15 years have seen marked progress in observing, understanding, and

predicting weather. At the same time, the U.S. has failed to match or surpass progress in numerical weather prediction achieved by other nations and failed to realize our own prediction potential. As a result, the nation is not mitigating the cost of weather impacts to the extent possible. Such mitigation costs are but a fraction of the cost of weather impacts. I offer the savings society may accrue by reducing the cost of weather impacts as one rationale for making a strong investment in NOAA a subcommittee priority for FY 2012 and beyond.

I would imagine that each of the other areas of the NOAA portfolio could make a similar case – that an adequate federal investment would provide society with both cost reductions and benefits that far exceed the incremental investment of scarce public resources. I hope the Subcommittee – even when confronted with the severe constraints of today’s budget environment – will see that by investing in NOAA, the public payoff will be substantial, valuable, and, literally, life saving.

I thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions the Members may have.