

Calendar No. 224

111TH CONGRESS
1st Session

SENATE

REPORT
111-105

AMATEUR RADIO EMERGENCY
COMMUNICATIONS ENHANCEMENT
ACT OF 2009

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE

TO ACCOMPANY

S. 1755

TO DIRECT THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY TO
UNDERTAKE A STUDY ON EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS



DECEMBER 10, 2009.—Ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
WASHINGTON : 2009

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DECEMBER 10, 2009.—Ordered to be printed

Mr. LIEBERMAN, from the Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 1755]

The Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, to which was referred the bill (S. 1755) to direct the Department of Homeland Security to undertake a study on emergency communications, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon without amendment and recommends that the bill do pass.

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I. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

S. 1755 seeks to determine how to harness the ability of the hundreds of thousands of American amateur radio operators who comprise the Amateur Radio Service to offer organized and orderly help to the government in times of emergency. It does so by directing the Secretary of Homeland Security to study, write a report on, and make recommendations with respect to the uses and capabilities of the Amateur Radio Service.

II. BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR THE LEGISLATION

Nearly 700,000 U.S. residents have licenses to operate amateur radios. Anyone seeking to use amateur radios in the United States must receive a license to do so from the Federal Communications

Commission; licensees thereby become part of the Amateur Radio Service. These operators play a vital role in communications during natural disasters and other emergencies when traditional phone lines may not function and cell phone services and other devices become overwhelmed. Volunteer radio operators provided these services during hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Hugo, and Andrew, during the relief effort at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon following the 2001 terrorist attacks, and during the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995. These services provided invaluable assistance on these and other occasions. The study commissioned by this bill will serve to further examine the utility of strengthening and expanding the capabilities of these operators for future emergencies.

III. LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

On October 6, 2009, Senators Joseph Lieberman and Susan Collins introduced S. 1755, which was referred to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. The Committee favorably reported the bill by a voice vote on November 4, 2009. Members present for the vote on the bill were Senators Lieberman, Levin, Akaka, Carper, Pryor, Landrieu, Burriss, Collins, and Bennett.

IV. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

Section 1 designates the name of the act as the “Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Enhancement Act of 2009.”

Section 2. Findings

Section 2 states Congress’ findings regarding the value of services provided by amateur radio service operators.

Section 3. Study of enhanced uses of amateur radio in emergency and disaster relief communication and for relief of restrictions

Subsection (a) requires the Secretary of Homeland Security to undertake a study examining the uses and capabilities of Amateur Radio Service communications in emergencies and disaster relief and submit a report to Congress on the findings of the study within 180 days of enactment of this act.

Subsection (b) provides that the study shall include a review of the extent to which amateur radio emergency communications can support homeland security missions relating to disasters, severe weather, and other threats to lives and property in the United States. The report must also provide recommendations for enhancements in the voluntary deployment of amateur radio licensees in relief efforts and improved integration of amateur radio operators in planning and furtherance of homeland security initiatives. The recommendations should also identify impediments to Amateur Radio Service communications and make recommendations regarding such impediments for consideration by other Federal departments, agencies, and Congress.

Subsection (c) requires the Secretary to utilize the expertise of stakeholder entities and organizations for the purposes of conducting this study.

V. EVALUATION OF REGULATORY IMPACT

Pursuant to the requirements of paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee has considered the regulatory impact of this bill. The Congressional Budget Office states that the bill contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would not effect state, local, and tribal governments. The enactment of this legislation will not have significant regulatory impact.

VI. CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

NOVEMBER 6, 2009.

Hon. JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN,
Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: The Congressional Budget Office has prepared the enclosed cost estimate for S. 1755, the Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Enhancement Act of 2009.

If you wish further details on this estimate, we will be pleased to provide them. The CBO staff contact is Daniel Hoople.

Sincerely,

DOUGLAS W. ELMENDORF,
Director.

Enclosure.

S. 1755—Amateur Radio Emergency Communications Enhancement Act of 2009

CBO estimates that implementing S. 1755 would have no significant cost over the next five years. Enacting this legislation would not affect direct spending or revenues.

S. 1755 contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act and would not affect the budgets of state, local, or tribal governments.

The bill would direct the Department of Homeland Security to conduct a study on the uses and capabilities of the Amateur Radio Service during and after a disaster or emergency. The study would be completed within 180 days of enactment of this legislation. Based on the costs of similar studies, CBO estimates that implementing S. 1755 would cost less than \$500,000, subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

The Amateur Radio Service is a voluntary organization made up of qualified people with a nonmonetary interest in radio. Amateur radio operators are licensed by the Federal Communications Commission based on skill and knowledge. Licensed operators may use a number of small, shared frequency bands to communicate through voice, teleprinting, telegraphy, facsimile, and television. During emergencies, amateur radio operators provide alerts and other communications in place of and in tandem with federal, state, and local government agencies and private relief organizations, such as the American Red Cross.

The CBO staff contact for this estimate is Daniel Hoople. This estimate was approved by Theresa Gullo, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.