## **Team Members:**

**Topic:** Should the National Weather Service be private or public?

**Position:** Privatize

## **Introduction (Name 1)**

Many Americans believe that the term privatization is a bad word, to the point where they never think to critically analyze why or why not a service should be offered using a corporate model. In fact, there are a variety of ways in which privatizing the National Weather Service would positively influence the American people.

To begin, the NWS is far too reliant on government funding. It is inherently a political arm of the government - which means it is subject to the agenda of the executive branch (Rumore). Furthermore, privatizing the NWS will lower taxes on Americans while also raising the standards of weather forecasting. While the NWS is currently dependent on the government, good weather business can help the communities they are in by providing jobs and spreading out experts. Instead of meteorologists needing to work in one a few key centers to examine the weather, they can work in every county, diversifying jobs as well as localizing weather.

When Americans hear the word privatization, many forget that citizens already look to corporations to advance new fields. When we think of the newest phone technology to when we might land on Mars, we look to companies to advance technology. Be it SpaceX or Apple, Privatization allows competing services to drive technological innovation. The same is with weather services, where privatization funds advancements in weather technology, quickly developing the field.

All of this is not even mentioning that consumers have already chosen corporations as their go to consumption of weather news. CNN? FOX? Weather.com? The apps you have on your phone? They're all private already. It can be biased for all of one’s sources to come from one place. Consumers recognize that - and allowing weather services to reaffirm one another via multiple readings from different sources would assure Americans of the accuracy in their weather. The NWS already relies on private companies to distribute their findings, and sometimes even to gather them, it’s something the private sector can do ("Policy Statement").

Thus, we argue in favor of privatization. If you're not convinced yet, then I ask you to consider what my colleagues have to say.

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## **Argument 1 (Name 2):** [**NWS**](https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/do-we-really-need-a-national-weather-service) **is Too Reliant on the Government**

The National Weather Service is altogether too reliant on the government. At present, it is affected by the winds of political change in a way that no publicly depended on organization should be. There have been ten total government shutdowns have occurred in our nation’s history. During the last thirty-nine years, there have been nine government shutdowns that caused the NWS to close its doors. Because it is a government agency, the NWS has to cease work in some areas during a shutdown.  
 The quality of national weather forecasts decreases greatly during these periods. “Non-essential” employees, those who are in charge of fact checking, cannot work during a shutdown. Consequently, the quality of national weather forecasts decreases (Marchand). The federal government has deemed those who fact check as “non-essential.” While the NWS may be able to continue operation without them, these employees are critical to maintaining the accuracy and the reliability of weather forecasting. When “non-essentials” are taken out of work poorly forecasted inclement weather can and will have drastic negative impacts on the population. 2013 is a perfect example of this. Six years ago, the government shutdown stopped aviation radiation monitoring, causing thousands of passengers to experience potentially devastating levels of in-flight radiation (Wilkins).  
 Trump tweeted inaccurately about a recent hurricane, and NOAA was quick to come to his aid after the NWS denounced the tweet as false. As the NWS is a part of NOAA, these two bodies shouldn’t contradict. Essentially, contradictions between government agencies shouldn’t be an issue. NOAA went against the NWS to back a claim made by the president (Leon).  
 “The NWS needn’t be compromised by shutdown drama and bureaucratic complacency” (Marchand). Simply put, weather should not be politicized by the increasingly dysfunctional and partisan American government as well as a lack of government pressure for bureaucrats to exceed in their work. The NWS, a resource used by almost every American, should be above this.

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## **Argument 2 (Name 3): More accurate forecasting**

Privatizing the weather industry would not only allow us to no longer rely on the government for weather data, but it would also allow us to have more accurate forecasting from different companies. What most people do not realize is that there are already private weather companies, such as: Spire, ClimaCell, IBM’s the Weather Company and Panasonic (UHCL). Private weather companies began to show up once the market pricing for weather satellites decreased, allowing other industries to afford them besides the government.

By privatizing the entire weather industry, it would become a free market (ErinThread). This means that companies would be in constant competition with each other. Ultimately, this would lead to them constantly improving their weather technology to improve their forecasting (PBS) in order to get more consumers.

Overall, by creating a free market within the weather industry, it would lead to an improvement in weather forecasting in general. Because of this, consumers like you and me would be more informed on the weather occuring in our area that day and be able to accommodate for that--thus making the privatization of the weather industry a good choice for the government to allow.

Privatization has already begun in the industry, and it will just keep advancing. We already access data from private weather companies everyday. When you check your phone in the morning to see what the weather is like for the day, that is a private company that is making the data from the National Weather Service to fit your needs. These needs include making it easier to read, and only receiving weather data from your location.

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## **Argument 3 (Name 4): Privatization of NWS benefits the public, the federal government, and the economy.**

What are the costs of the National Weather Service (NWS), and who pays for it? In FY18, NOAA’s final funding increased by 4% YoY, totaling to $5.909 billion. Specifically, NWS saw a funding increase of 3% YoY, totaling to $1.157 billion.[[1]](#footnote-1) The cost of the NWS has been consistently increasing over time. Since NOAA and NWS are part of the Federal Government, their funding comes from the US Government Budget, and the public bears NWS’s costs through federal taxes, whether or not they use their services. In a free market, only those who want to use these services will pay for them. Why should consumers bear the costs of services they do not use?

Relating back to our previous arguments, what happens if the government shuts down? What happens when restrictions in funding disincentivize the NWS to pursue new technological advances? What happens when the NWS, who is the sole agency responsible for producing services in a billion dollar industry, fails? There are many risks to not privatizing the NWS, and these risks are more likely to become reality rather than theoretical. But to make answer these questions and form a proper, logical argument, it is necessary to learn from real world examples of privatization.

One real-world example is the Commercial Space Launch Amendments Act of 2004,[[2]](#footnote-2) which legalized privatization of space travel and allowed companies to join the space race that was once monopolized by NASA. This act allowed the formation of private companies such as SpaceX and Virgin Galactic, gave NASA support from these companies, and led to positive stimulation of the US economy. In 2014, NASA produced a research report that analyzed the results of 10 years of privatization. These are the key benefits that NASA outlined:

“Private companies showed major positive economic indicators throughout all areas of the space industry, including; $190 billion in revenues from Global Satellite Markets, $133 billion in profits from Terrestrial Mining, $100 million raised by small satellite companies in venture capital and angel investments, $73 billion in revenues from global geospatial services, and the ability for Telecommunication companies (a $4.9 trillion industry) to access communications satellite services.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Through these statistics, we can see that privatization of the space industry resulted in massive economic benefits.

Along with this, NASA stated that it benefited heavily from support of private companies in its sector: “NASA used its Space Act Agreement to enter into partnerships for the development and demonstration of new commercial cargo space transportation systems… [and] partnerships for the development and demonstration of transportation systems to low-Earth orbit.”[[4]](#footnote-4) So not only did privatization result in economic growth, it also allowed NASA to benefit from the influx of resources and wealth in the space sector. We can see that there are massive benefits to privatization of government agencies, and it would be foolish to say that privatization of NWS will be anything but a positive for the U.S. Not only will the NWS be allowed to form these crucial private-public partnerships and gain access to increased resources, wealth, and support functions; but will also result in similar economic growth indicators seen through privatization of the Space Industry due to capitalization of the Weather Industry. These results will benefit the public, the fed, the NWS, and ultimately the U.S. economy.

***Note that this person did not cite sources appropriately!***

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## **Conclusion (Name 5)**

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***Note that this paper is missing a conclusion. That’s because this team member didn’t pull their weight! If this happens to your team, reach out to me, and I will attempt to rectify the situation myself.***

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***(This bib was mostly okay, but the formatting was a little wonky and they didn’t include their names next to their annotations.)***

## **Annotated Bibliography**

“Commercial Space Launch Amendments Act of 2004.” Pub. L. 108-492. 23 Dec. 2004.

*Federal Aviation Administration.* Web. 17 Sept. 2019.

<https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ast/media/PL108-492.pdf>

This act, published by the Federal Aviation Administration, gives a full description of the changes made in 2004 to the Commercial Space Launch Act, and how the government will enforce these changes. The purpose of the law is “To promote the development of the emerging commercial human space flight industry, and for other purposes.” Through the Act, Congress approved the privatization of the Space Industry as long as companies follow the regulation of human space flight and standard safety, repealing the previous amendment of 1998.

“Concerns Regarding the Privatization of Weather Data”. *UHCL The Signal.* www.uhclthesignal.com/wordpress/2019/07/22/story-concerns-regarding-the-privatization-of-weather-data/*.* Accessed 15 Sept. 2019.

This resource discussed how privatization of the weather industry has already begun. The author used examples of companies that are already private weather companies. This article made it apparent to readers that privatization is already here, and it is just going to keep expanding.

“Final FY18 Appropriations: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.” *American*

*Institute of Physics*. 6 April 2018. Web. 17 Sept. 2019.

<https://www.aip.org/fyi/2018/final-fy18-appropriations-national-oceanic-and-atmospheric-administration>

This article, published by the American Institute of Physics, summarizes the changes of The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) budget in fiscal year 2018, and outlines all divisions within the NOAA, including the National Weather Service (NWS). The article also outlines the changes requested from President Trump, and the final changes enacted year over year from FY17 to FY18.

Leon, Melissa. “Weather Agency Now Backs Trump, Says Dorian Could Have Impacted Alabama.” *Fox News*, FOX News Network, 7 Sept. 2019, www.foxnews.com/politics/weather-officials-say-dorian-could-have-impacted-alabama-as-trump-said. The NWS and NOAA have become political tools of the government. After the President tweeted a map that was not up to date that said Alabama could be impacted by Hurricane Dorian, the NWS office of Birmingham, Alabama responded saying that Alabama would not be impacted. NOAA, which the NWS falls under, then responded saying the President's tweet was correct. This back and forth left many Americans confused and unknowing if they should evacuate or not.

Marchand, Ross. “Shutdown Drama Shows Need for Private Weather Service.” *Townhall*, Townhall.com, 22 Jan. 2019, townhall.com/columnists/rossmarchand/2019/01/22/shutdown-drama-shows-need-for-private-weather-service-n2539369. Due to the government shutdown, nonessential employees do not work for the National Weather Service. This means that forecasts are not verified and fact-checked. Some NWS offices were forced to shut down due to the December, 2018 to January, 2019 shutdown. As the shutdown continued, forecasts were degrading in quality is offices closed and forecasts were not verified.

“Policy Statement on the Weather Service/Private Sector Role.” *Policy Statement*

*on the Weather Service/Private Sector Roles*,

https://www.nws.noaa.gov/im/fedreg.htm.

This Policy Statement outlines how there already is a relationship between NWS and the private sector. The NWS is dependent on both the Federal Government and private sector to both obtain and disseminate information. The statement discusses how the private sector already obtains data for the NWS (climatology reports, tailored weather forecasts), thus adds to the arguments that the private sector could take over weather forecasting.

“Public-Private Partnerships for Space Capability Development - Driving Economic Growth and

NASA’s Missions.” *NASA.* April 2014. Web. 17 Sept. 2019. <https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/files/NASA_Partnership_Report_LR_20140429.pdf>

This report, developed by NASA in 2014, outlines the observations, research, and results of the Commercial Space Launch Amendments Act of 2004. NASA outlines that through privatization and public-private partnerships with U.S. commercial companies, the space industry has seen unexpected developments, positive economic indicators, and forecasted growth in the 8 major areas of the Space Industry; Satellite Servicing, Interplanetary Small Satellites, Robotic Mining, Microgravity Research for Biomedical Applications, Liquid Rocket Engines for Launch Vehicles, Wireless Power, Space Communications, and Earth Observation Data Visualization. NASA concludes that privatization has led to technological and economic developments, and that future partnerships could result in supporting NASA’s Mission as well as provide U.S. economic benefits.

Rumore, Kori, et al. “Chicago Tribune.” *Chicagotribune.com*, Chicago

Tribune,https://www.chicagotribune.com/nation-world/ct-nw-nationa

l-weather-service-trump-20190909-bmuin3uuzfam3jpfql7zpdxg7y-st

ory.

This article discusses the recent politicization of the National Weather Service by President Donald Trump. The article refers to the debacle with Hurricane Dorian warnings in Alabama, and how the NWS had difficulty disseminating correct information. Since the NWS is a political entity, it is subject to the will of the executive branch, which can mix politics with safety. This article is related to our argument that politicization of weather is dangerous, and that forecasting should be apolitical.

Shi, Lina. "The Implications of the Privatization of Space Exploration." *Wharton UPenn*, 12 Dec. 2016. Accessed 17 Sept. 2019

<https://publicpolicy.wharton.upenn.edu/live/news/1619-the-implications-of-the-privatization-of-space#_edn7>

This scholarly article, published by the Public Policy Initiative at UPenn Wharton, discusses the effects of the privatization of the Space Industry. The article gives an outline of the privatization of the industry, along with both the economic and technological benefits and costs. The article concludes that overall, the benefits of privatization outweigh the costs, and forecasts increasing benefits resulting from privatization rather than government efforts.

Wilkins, Richard, et al. “U.S. Government Shutdown Degrades Aviation Radiation Monitoring during Solar Radiation Storm.” *IEEE Explore Digital Library*, IEEE, Jan. 2014, ieeexplore.ieee.org/abstract/document/7767153/authors#authors. The United States government shutdown of October 1, 2013 to October 13, 2013 greatly impacted the aviation radiation-monitoring of the U.S. and the world. The pause in radiation monitoring by the U.S. could lead to cancer in some flyers. The steps to avoid radiation when flying is simple, but the information was not available over this time period.

“Who Benefits from the Privatization of Weather Data?” *PBS NewsHour.* www.pbs.org/newshour/show/who-benefits-from-the-privatization-of-weather-data. Accessed 15 Sept. 2019.

This article talked about the benefits of privatizing the weather industry. In an interview with Andrew Blum, who authored “The Weather Machine: A Journey Inside the Forecast”, Blum discussed what all consumers would gain out of the entire weather industry no longer being in the government sector.

“Why the National Weather Service should not be Privatized.” *ErinThread.* www.erinthead.com/writing/nwsfunding.htm. Accessed 15 Sept. 2019

This resource discussed how if the weather industry was privatized, it would then create a free market for the industry. The article then also mentioned how this free market would allow companies to compete against each other, thus improving weather technology constantly, making forecasts more accurate.

1. <https://www.aip.org/fyi/2018/final-fy18-appropriations-national-oceanic-and-atmospheric-administration> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.faa.gov/about/office_org/headquarters_offices/ast/media/PL108-492.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.nasa.gov/sites/default/files/files/NASA_Partnership_Report_LR_20140429.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://publicpolicy.wharton.upenn.edu/live/news/1619-the-implications-of-the-privatization-of-space#_edn7> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)