



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Research and Technology &
Subcommittee on Environment Hearing:

Calm Before the Storm: Reauthorizing the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program

Wednesday, December 4

Thank you, Chairwomen Stevens and Fletcher, for holding this hearing. As Chair Fletcher already discussed, the state of Texas has experienced devastating loss of life and property from hurricanes and associated flooding. Texas is also one of the states most vulnerable to tornadoes. When an EF-3 Tornado hit my home city of Dallas in October, hundreds of people lost their homes or businesses. Two Dallas schools were destroyed. One estimate puts the economic cost of the tornadoes that struck North Texas that night at \$2 billion. We are very fortunate that no lives were lost.

This nation is facing increasing natural disasters of all kinds due to climate change and land use changes. The human and financial toll of these disasters is increasing not just because of the increased severity and frequency of disasters, but also because of the growing population, the shift in where people are living, and the planning and policy choices made by local and state leaders.

In Texas, building codes are adopted at the city and county level. A new survey of jurisdictions along the Texas coast by the Insurance Institute for Business and Home Safety found that 840,000 Texans live in areas with no adopted residential building code. In its 2018 report rating state building code systems for all eastern and southern coastal states, the same Institute gave Texas a score of 34 out of 100. Only 3 states ranked lower. Florida, on the other hand, received a 95. I hate to say it, but in this case, Florida proves that where there is a will, there is a way.

The National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program provides states and local jurisdictions, as well as individual home and business owners with the tools and information they need to protect their families, their property, and their communities. The risks are increasing, but the 15-year old NWIRP program has not received the support it merits, including here in Congress. The program is carrying on even after the expiration of the last reauthorization thanks to the commitment and hard work of program staff in each of the key agencies. And I applaud them for that. But they are

operating on a shoestring budget at best. We must provide them with the resources and other support to carry out their mission.

Many of us on this Committee are from states that have seen widespread devastation from windstorms. And we will see more. We are from red states and blue states, big cities and rural areas, wealthy and poor states.

All of our communities are at risk, and those who are already the most economically vulnerable suffer the most when natural disasters strike. As you have heard and will hear from others in the hearing, \$1 invested in resilience is \$10 saved. Reauthorizing the NWIRP program and providing the agencies with much needed resources will be a priority for this Committee in the new year. I look forward to working with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle and in the Senate to get this done.