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

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Research & Technology Subcommittee Hearing:
Weathering the Storm: Reauthorizing the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program

Wednesday, November 10, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Stevens and Ranking Member Waltz, for holding this important hearing today. And thank you to our witnesses for joining us.

Many Americans have suffered personal losses from severe storms and flooding. The frequency, severity, and cost of disasters will only continue to increase with climate change. Storms do not know the difference between rich and poor, Black and white. Nevertheless, because of stark economic and racial disparities in where people live and the resilience of their homes and communities, the brunt of these storms is too often felt by poor minority communities. A single storm can push families over the edge to financial catastrophe.

Accurate and timely forecasts are important for knowing when and whether to evacuate communities and prepare for storm impacts. Forecasting hurricanes, tornadoes, and other windstorm events has improved significantly in the last 30 years, thanks to the work of NOAA and the National Weather Service. But accurate weather forecasts aren't enough to reduce windstorm impacts and save lives.

In Texas, we're no strangers to impacts from powerful tornadoes and hurricanes. Tornadoes cause more deaths per year than earthquakes and hurricanes combined. Aside from tornado shelters however, buildings have historically not been designed to withstand tornadoes. At a recent Committee hearing, we heard about the devastating 2011 tornado outbreak in the South. The Joplin tornado prompted the National Institute of Standards and Technology to investigate the damages to buildings. NIST collaborated with private sector partners to develop a new building standard that takes account of tornado threats for the first time. While more progress has been made in designing buildings resilient to hurricane winds, they remain vulnerable to coastal storm surge and flooding related to hurricanes.

The National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program (NWIRP) directs not just individual agency investments and activities, it requires active coordination and collaboration among the Program agencies. NWIRP ensures that the research on windstorms and windstorm impacts is translated

into more resilient buildings and communities, including through collaboration with the private sector to update model building codes and modernize approaches to building design. Under NWIRP and otherwise, the Federal government can help provide tools, resources, and incentives to improve windstorm preparedness and mitigation. However, it is up to local and state governments to adopt these tools to protect their most vulnerable communities from natural disasters.

While the outcomes of NWIRP have been significant, the program receives little attention and funding. Nevertheless, the agencies have continued in their efforts, and they need our support. I look forward to working with my colleagues to reauthorize and update NWIRP to build a more resilient future and help protect the most vulnerable among us.