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

Representative Haley Stevens (D-MI)

Full Committee Hearing:
Federal Climate Adaptation and Resilience for the 21st Century

March 8, 2022

Good morning to all of my colleagues and thank you to all of our witnesses for joining us here today. I look forward to an excellent discussion that will signify the extent to which Federal climate adaptation and resilience is a priority for the Committee.

I'm very excited to lead this hearing because this is an issue that should resonate with anyone who cares about making the Federal Government work for the American people. On the Science Committee, we see all the time the incredible things that the Federal Government can do. We see NOAA develop forecasts and models that have revolutionized our understanding of the natural world – and that save lives when extreme weather threatens our communities. We see the Department of Energy invest in groundbreaking technologies that change the boundaries of what we think is possible. We see NASA push the limits of human knowledge beyond even our planet itself. I truly believe that all of us, on both sides of the aisle, are committed to supporting the missions of these agencies and ensuring that they can get the job done.

Climate change is a threat to these agencies and the entire Federal Government that cannot be ignored. By now, we are all too familiar with the litany of climate risks that confront our society: rising sea levels and more frequent coastal floods; dangerous wildfires sparked by higher temperatures and longer, more intense droughts; intense precipitation that overwhelms flood protections; and many more. Federal Agencies are part of our society as well, and they must adapt along with the rest of us.

As the owners of a vast and complex asset infrastructure, agencies like NOAA, DOE, and NASA are vulnerable to the full spectrum of climate impacts. The testimony of our witnesses today will make that clear. NASA's launch facilities, which are essential to the agency's mission, are coastal and gravely threatened by sea level rise. DOE's National Laboratories, a jewel of American scientific research, are grappling with the need to maintain safety protocols under more extreme weather conditions. NOAA's finely tuned instruments and platforms, which generate data that underpins so much vital scientific work, are increasingly operating in conditions beyond their designed operating parameters. Climate change is not an abstract phenomenon for these agencies, and for their fellow agencies across the executive branch. It is a concrete, tangible danger that could undermine core agency functions if not properly addressed.

The answer, as we will discuss in this hearing, is to bolster climate adaptation and resilience processes throughout the Federal Government. To ensure that facilities are protected, operations are insulated, and future investments are made wisely, Federal agencies must adapt to climate risk and strengthen their resilience to climate impacts. It will not be easy. Agencies will need a detailed understanding of their own climate vulnerabilities. They will need to update their planning processes to account for these vulnerabilities. They will need to incorporate climate data into basic management functions, and they will need to teach their workforces how to interpret that data accurately. Finally, they will need the resources and the support to implement their adaptation and resilience strategies. It will be a large undertaking and it will take sustained effort over many years. But it is necessary, and I believe there will be bipartisan support for it. Protecting the capabilities of Federal agencies like NOAA, DOE, and NASA is a shared goal for all of us.

We should also realize that climate change does not only threaten Federal science agencies – it also highlights how vital their work truly is. The scientific assets that must be protected from climate impacts are the very assets that will lead the way in strengthening adaptation and resilience. NOAA, NASA, and DOE produce climate data, create climate-resilient technologies, and operate advanced scientific tools that will provide the foundation for climate adaptation and resilience across the Federal Government. They can lead the way – not only to protect themselves, but also to educate their fellow agencies about how to do the same. I am eager to hear more about how Federal science agencies can enhance inter-agency cooperation to the benefit of the entire government.

I want to think all of our witnesses for testifying before the Committee today. As representatives of NOAA, DOE, NASA, and GAO, you are leaders in preparing the Federal Government for climate change and working to mitigate the climate impacts confronting your own agencies and the government as a whole. You can help us to understand the true scale of this challenge, as well as the best ways for Congress to support adaptation and resilience strategies in the years to come. Thank you all for your commitment to public service and for the important work that you do.

I now yield to Ranking Member Lucas for his opening statement.