

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
Subcommittee on Space
“Surveying the Space Weather Landscape”
April 26, 2018

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Space weather is not well understood but has the potential to impact our daily lives in significant ways. It is a field that is ripe for research and innovation to ensure that life and property can be protected from the negative impacts of large-scale space weather storms, but also from the daily challenges posed by space weather events. The need for basic research is clear as many of the fundamental science and physics questions related to the Sun-Earth system and space weather remain unanswered.

I am pleased that the Chairman is holding this hearing today as it allows us to assess the current state of space weather research and preparedness. I look forward to today’s discussion, and I hope it will allow us to move quickly to markup Mr. Perlmutter’s “Space Weather Research and Forecasting Act,” and take it to the House floor for a vote. This bill is widely supported by the broad space weather community, which includes federal agencies, academia, and the commercial sector.

Today’s panel of expert witnesses is well-suited to provide us with an update on the current state of space weather research and development, but also to make clear the need for prompt passage of this legislation to prevent backsliding on progress made to date. I am heartened to see that we have witnesses from both NASA and NOAA, the two lead federal agencies responsible for collecting data on, modeling, and forecasting space weather events to the public, to provide the Administration’s perspective. Having an academic and a representative from the commercial sector at the table allows for a robust discussion not only on the ‘state of the science’ in space weather, but also about current research needs moving forward. At this critical juncture, it is important for Congress to continue the forward momentum of what was set in motion by the National Space Weather Strategy and the National Space Weather Action Plan in 2015.

Space weather research and prediction capabilities are widely considered to be almost 50 years behind the state of terrestrial weather prediction, leaving our society at a disadvantage. Space weather impacts can be far-reaching with disturbances in the Sun-Earth system potentially leading to disruption of key services such as GPS, the electric grid, and airline communications to name a few. Despite our current observing assets that are gathering data on space weather phenomena, we need to be thinking ahead to the next round of needed observational capabilities to ensure a continuation of critical data collection. We cannot sit idly by and take our time to protect our critical investments and society from the persistent damaging impacts of space weather events.

Based on the need for additional research and collaboration, and the clear and persistent threats posed by space weather phenomenon on our daily lives, there is no better time than now to put forth a legislative framework approach on how this critical issue should be addressed.

Thank you. I yield back.