

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Environment Subcommittees Hearing
2318 Rayburn House Office Building
May 23, 2013; 9:30 AM
“Restoring U.S. Leadership In Weather Forecasting”

Thank you, Chairman Stewart. And welcome to the witnesses, Mr. Meyers and Mr. Kirchner. I want to thank you for appearing here to provide your insights regarding weather data and weather forecasting.

My thoughts and prayers go out to all of the victims of the powerful and devastating tornado that just days ago swept through the state of Oklahoma. All of us have been moved by this event and the courageous efforts of the community. This event is a painful reminder that we are all vulnerable to unexpected disasters, and it also highlights how critical the work of the National Weather Service is as a public safety tool.

And that leads us to the purpose of today’s hearing. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) have an expansive mission: to predict the weather, to insure healthy oceans and fisheries, to address climate mitigation and adaptation, and to enhance the resilience of our coastal communities and economies.

To carry out all of these missions, NOAA must manage a very broad set of scientific challenges and look for ways to incorporate the findings of research into the daily lives of all our citizens.

In recent years, our nation has experienced harsher climactic conditions and a wave of severe weather. From unprecedented heat waves and droughts to severe record-breaking weather events across the country, we have received constant reminders of the importance of accurate and timely weather prediction.

Good weather prediction, however, doesn’t just happen. It requires collection of the appropriate data, and our understanding of what is useful evolves over time. It also requires us to conduct scientific research to understand the physical processes that drive short- and long-term weather conditions.

Unfortunately, the draft legislation that we are considering today includes little to no acknowledgment of NOAA’s other missions carried out by the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, particularly with regard to its climate and ocean research. Although my colleagues across the dais might not always agree on every issue around climate and ocean science, sacrificing these critical areas will only weaken us for the future. Understanding the climate is as critical to public protection as understanding the weather.

It’s unfortunate that NOAA could not be here today. They were invited just 10 days ago on May 13 by a letter from the Chairman. It is my understanding that a copy of the draft bill was given to the agency at that time. Six working days is simply not enough time for an agency to evaluate a bill, compose testimony, and then clear that testimony through OMB.

Also, NOAA just released their “Weather Ready Nation Roadmap” last month, after they spent more than a year preparing the report and seeking public input. Additionally, there have been four outside

reviews of NWS and NOAA R&D in the last year—two by the National Academies of Science, one by the National Academy of Public Administration, and one done for the NOAA Science Advisory Board. These reports address key issues like how to move from research to operations; the need for NOAA to more actively tap the modeling and forecasting expertise in the research community; and the divisions within NWS and between NWS and OAR.

The draft legislation does not address all these relevant issues but they need to be considered. It would be both appropriate and beneficial for this Subcommittee to receive testimony about these reports before we move to markup a bill. We can work together in this area if we have more complete information, which requires a more complete Committee record than today's hearing will yield.

As I indicated to the Chairman, the minority submits that the importance of weather forecasting and the work of NOAA are so important that we are invoking our Rule XI right to ask for a second day of witnesses. I am attaching that letter to my statement for inclusion in the record.

I am sure we can work together, Mr. Chairman, to find a date and time and a range of expert witnesses who can help us craft strong legislation that will improve weather forecasting for the nation. I look forward to working with you Mr. Chairman in this critically important area.