

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Environment Subcommittees Hearing
2318 Rayburn House Office Building
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“Restoring U.S. Leadership In Weather Forecasting Part 2”

Thank you, Chairman Stewart, for holding this hearing today. This is our second hearing to consider legislation to improve the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA’s) weather forecasting abilities. I appreciate your willingness to work together to plan this hearing, and I’m pleased that we ended up with such a distinguished panel of witnesses. The views of NOAA, as represented by Dr. Sullivan, as well as those of our three witnesses from the non-governmental portion of the Weather Enterprise, will greatly enrich our understanding of how to improve weather forecasting.

I want to thank you, Chairman Stewart, for the bipartisan spirit you have shown in inviting collaboration on legislation. The draft bill we took testimony on in the first hearing has been replaced and expanded upon in the bill introduced by Subcommittee Vice Chair Mr. Bridenstine. There are many elements of that bill that are promising. I am particularly enthusiastic about the new section on tornado forecast research and I want to applaud the gentleman from Oklahoma for including that provision.

We all agree that weather forecasting must be improved. As we learn more about weather forecasting in the United States—how it is done and the partnership that has evolved between NOAA, academic researchers, and private businesses—it becomes evident that the core of the bill should be refocused away from its emphasis on research at OAR, the Office of Oceans and Atmospheric Research, and more on the actual forecasters’ needs at the National Weather Service (NWS).

Putting all our legislative emphasis on the OAR seems inconsistent with our stated intention of improving forecasting and protecting lives. OAR is a research arm in NOAA that manages oceans, Great Lakes, climate, weather, and computer research. It makes more sense, Mr. Chairman, to authorize the National Weather Service directly and to put the forecasting operation in the lead on guiding research into innovations that have real utility. If our goal is to enhance forecasting, empowering the forecasters would seem to be the obvious way to proceed; this is, in fact, the way the Army, Navy, and Air Force all do their research to operations efforts.

Additionally the bill appears to create unnecessary conflict between the researchers at OAR and the forecasters and researchers at NWS, as well as the between the weather portion of OAR and the oceans and climate portfolios at OAR. We need progress in all of these areas to improve forecasting.

As Dr. Sullivan concisely explains in her testimony, “In the scientific world, ‘weather’ is classified at shorter time scales, which technically extends to two weeks. Any forecast timescales beyond two weeks are classified as ‘climate’.”

Emphasizing “weather” research over “climate” research is likely to be counterproductive. As Dr. Drogemeier states in his testimony, “All of us recognize the importance of balance between weather and climate investments in our nation’s research and operations portfolio. Yet, the traditional ‘line’ dividing weather and climate is increasingly blurred as climate models are now run at resolutions approaching

those of weather models. Consequently, we would do well to consider weather and climate not as two distinct elements at the extreme ends of a spectrum, but rather as inseparable parts of the Earth system.”

Mr. Chairman, I am confident that, working together , we can craft a bill that is on target with the needs of the weather community, fiscally responsible, and protective of public safety. I am very optimistic that this subcommittee can draft a bill that is constructive and truly bipartisan. If we closely study the testimony we have received, it will give us a good guide for how to move forward and I hope we can do that together.