

Opening Statement for the Markup of H.R. 3479
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
December 1, 2011

Thank you, Chairman Hall. Today, we are marking up H.R. 3479, the *Natural Hazards Risk Reduction Act of 2011*. This bill reauthorizes two important programs — the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program—or NEHRP and the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program—or NWIRP.

It has been a devastating year for natural disasters in this country. We've experienced the deadliest and most destructive tornado season in U.S. history. We've had earthquakes in areas that don't usually experience earthquakes, including Virginia and Oklahoma. And Hurricane Irene caused widespread destruction and death along the Eastern seaboard.

This Committee has an important role to play in helping Americans prepare for and recover from tornadoes and other natural disasters by facilitating the disaster resiliency of communities. By reauthorizing the earthquake and windstorm reduction programs, we can minimize the number of Americans who are harmed or killed by natural disasters or who have to face the challenge of putting their homes, businesses, and communities back together.

These programs both have proven track records in reducing the vulnerability of our communities to natural disasters. They support research and development to better understand earthquakes and windstorms and their impacts. The results of this work have led to advancements in monitoring, the design and construction of infrastructure and critical lifelines, and public awareness and preparation for tornadoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes.

Today's bill includes many good provisions that I believe are important and will make the programs more efficient and effective. For example, establishing NIST as the lead agency for both programs, improving the coordination of these programs with other federal agencies, and increasing transparency are all positive additions.

That being said, there is definitely room for improvement. As an authorizing committee, we require agencies to carry out specific activities and have an obligation to authorize the funding that we believe is needed by the agencies to effectively carry out all of what we have required of them. As authorizers, we must ask ourselves how much money an agency truly needs to do every single thing we have asked of it exceedingly well.

It is then the responsibility of the Appropriations Committee to weigh various priorities in the context of the current budgetary climate and determine what ultimately should be funded and at what level.

Unfortunately, the funding levels in this bill do not seem to align with our responsibilities as an authorizing committee. The bill reduces the authorization level for NEHRP by 36 percent and NWIRP by 14 percent when compared to the last year the programs were authorized. Furthermore, it constrains both programs by providing flat authorizations that are 6 percent below current spending.

While some may claim that our budgetary situation has changed, the truth is that the need to improve the disaster resiliency of our communities has not.

We don't have any reason to believe that these agencies need any less money to carry out these responsibilities than we determined was necessary the last time we reauthorized these programs. Yet the

bill fails to take a single step to reduce or minimize the obligations of these agencies to justify a reduction in authorized funding. Without a corresponding reduction in responsibilities, we are doing nothing less than setting these agencies up to fail.

For these reasons, I believe that the authorization levels in this bill have missed the mark. This is especially true this year, when disasters have caused over \$45 billion in economic damage and cost hundreds of lives across this country.

And we simply can't afford to have these agencies miss further opportunities to implement low-cost mitigation measures. Studies have shown that for every dollar we invest in mitigation activities through FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation program, we save \$3 to \$4 in recovery costs. In the end, strong and effective hazard reduction programs will not only save lives and property, but also provide us with meaningful cost savings.

Thank you, Chairman Hall. I yield back the balance of my time.