Opening Statement
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Joint Hearing - Subcommittee on Technology and Subcommittee on Research
Ranking Member Frederica Wilson (D-FL)
Federal Efforts to Reduce the Impacts of Windstorms

June 5, 2013

Thank you, Chairman Bucshon and Chairman Massie for holding today's hearing on the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program—or N-WIRP [*N- werp*].

N-WIRP directs four federal agencies –FEMA, NOAA, NSF, and NIST–to conduct coordinated research and development on the nature of windstorms, their effects, and on ways to mitigate their impact. The program also calls on these agencies to make sure this research is translated into practice. This work has led to advances in monitoring, the design and construction of buildings, and increased awareness and preparation by the public. But there is still much more to be done.

Regrettably, consideration of this program is timely as our thoughts and prayers go out to the people of Moore, Oklahoma, who are putting the pieces back together after a massive tornado ripped through their community just two weeks ago.

As a Floridian and a survivor of Hurricane Andrew, I know firsthand that natural hazards are a leading threat to America's economy and American lives. In recent years, Americans have seen flooded subway stations in New York City, earthquake damage in the Nation's Capital, the great American city of New Orleans submerged under water, unimaginable devastation in Joplin, Missouri, and now entire neighborhoods in Oklahoma flattened to the ground.

There has, in fact, been a record number of declared federal disasters in the United States over the last two years, and 2011 was the deadliest year on record for tornadoes with over 550 fatalities.

While we cannot stop a hurricane or tornado from happening, we should do all that we can to make sure our communities have the tools they need to respond and recover from such an event.

We as a nation must invest in preparedness and resilience. Studies of FEMA's pre-disaster mitigation program have shown that for every dollar we invest in mitigation activities, we save $3 to $4 dollars in recovery costs.

N-WIRP has the potential to dramatically bolster the resiliency of our communities and reduce the costs associated with disaster recovery.
Unfortunately, experts have expressed concern that insufficient funding has negatively impacted the implementation of the program and we are missing out on low-cost mitigation opportunities.

Because of this I do have some concerns with the legislation we are considering today. First, the bill cuts the authorization level for the program by 14 percent. Second, it "locks in" this lower funding level for the duration of the bill. We don't have any reason to believe the agencies need any less money to carry out the responsibilities we assigned them the last time we reauthorized

this program. And when we consider the devastating losses that have plagued the United States recently, this course of action seems irresponsible.

That is why I reintroduced the bipartisan version of the *Natural Hazards Risk Reduction Act,* which will provide the program with an authorization level more appropriate to the task. This legislation passed the House by an overwhelming margin in the 111th Congress and it also reauthorizes the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program. While they are differences between hazards there are also commonalities and occasions where we should leverage resources.

This Committee has an important role to play in helping Americans prepare for and recover from all natural hazards. By reauthorizing both of these 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.
I look forward to working with my colleagues to make our communities more disaster resilient.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. And thank you to the witnesses for being here. I yield back the balance of my time.