

Opening Statement

Vice Ranking Member Frederica Wilson (D-FL)

Markup of H.R. 1786 – *National Windstorm Impact Reduction Act Reauthorization of 2013*

June 30, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for holding today's markup to reauthorize the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program – or NWIRP.

The reauthorization of this program is timely after the deadly destruction we have seen in places like Texas and Oklahoma. Every year, severe winds from hurricanes, tornadoes, and thunderstorms damage or destroy thousands of homes and businesses, harm vital infrastructure, and, most importantly, threaten human life.

N-WIRP has the potential to lessen the loss of life and economic damage by translating research and development on the understanding of windstorms and their impacts into improved building codes and emergency planning.

While it is apparent that the need for this program is great, it is regrettable that the Majority has decided to markup this legislation without a detailed examination of the program.

The Subcommittee held one hearing on this program. During that hearing—which included only outside stakeholders—all the witnesses expressed their concern that the NWIRP program was significantly underfunded.

After hearing the concerns that the program is underfunded, the Subcommittee should have held a hearing with witnesses from the NWIRP federal agencies. That hearing would have given Subcommittee Members the opportunity to ask NWIRP agencies about how they are implementing the program, what activities are being prioritized, what activities are not being addressed, and what level of resources the agencies need to fully implement the program.

Without that hearing, we do not have the information we need to reauthorize this program. A single NWIRP agency has informally told us that in 2012 they spent more money than this bill

authorizes for all four NWIRP agencies combined. It is regrettable that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle would make significant cuts to the program without hearing from the federal agencies first.

In fact, the Committee has not heard from a federal witness about the NWIRP program for five years. I would like to point out that during those five years, over a thousand Americans have lost their lives due to windstorms and the Federal government has spent over \$136 billion in disaster relief and recovery.

If the Subcommittee had held additional hearings with federal witnesses, it might have been possible for the Subcommittee to work on a bipartisan bill to reauthorize the NWIRP program with any necessary programmatic changes needed and with proper authorization levels.

But that is not what the Majority decided to do. Instead, we are holding a markup this morning without hearing from the federal agencies involved in the program. That means that we are marking up this bill without a clear understanding of how the NWIRP program is working and what the appropriate authorization levels are for the federal agencies involved.

Further, it is not clear to me that the Majority has worked with the other House Committees that share jurisdiction over the agencies in this bill. This is especially troubling for FEMA. In Mr. Neugebauer's 2004 bill, FEMA was authorized at \$8.7 million for their NWIRP activities. In the bill we are marking up today, FEMA is authorized at just \$2 million.

In a time where destructive windstorms are becoming more frequent, I would think FEMA—the NWIRP agency tasked with taking the research conducted at the other agencies and developing mitigation techniques and public outreach—would need additional rather than reduced authorization levels.

Finally, I am not sure if the Majority has talked or worked with their Senate counterparts on this bill. If the goal is to enact this legislation so the NWIRP program can be reauthorized, it would be helpful to work with the other body of Congress.

It is unfortunate that the Majority decided to move this bill to a markup before holding the hearings that would have provided the Committee Members with the information needed to properly markup this legislation.

I would like to end by saying that in the past this Committee has taken a more comprehensive approach to hazards by marking up NWIRP along with the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program or NEHRP program. It makes sense to move these interagency programs together, which is why I introduced the *Natural Hazards Risk Reduction Act of 2013* that would reauthorize both the NWIRP and NEHRP programs. While severe weather has dominated the headlines recently, we should not overlook the significant risk associated with earthquakes. I will be supporting my colleague's amendment that addresses this issue.