

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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**Statement of Environment Subcommittee Chairman Chris Stewart (R-Utah)
Hearing on "Restoring U.S. Leadership in Weather Forecasting"**

Chairman Stewart: Good morning and welcome to this morning's Environment Subcommittee hearing entitled "Restoring U.S. Leadership in Weather Forecasting."

First, let me say that our prayers are with the people of Oklahoma. This tragedy highlights the importance of real time forecasting to protect lives and property.

I'd like to thank our excellent witnesses for traveling to be here today. While this hearing was scheduled several weeks ago to discuss draft legislation to help enhance weather forecasting, the tragedy in Oklahoma underscores the importance of this issue and should encourage us to start tackling these questions now. It is unfortunate that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is unable to testify in-person today; however, we have asked Acting Administrator Kathy Sullivan to submit comments for the record and we will work to accommodate her in-person testimony on these issues next month.

We need a world-class system of weather prediction in the United States - one, as the National Academy of Sciences recently put it, that is "second to none." We can thank the hard-working men and women at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA, and their partners throughout the weather enterprise for the great strides that have been made in forecasting in recent decades. But we can do better.

Superstorm Sandy made clear what many in the weather community have known for years: Our model for weather prediction has fallen behind Europe and other parts of the world in predicting weather events in the United States. The Weather Forecasting Improvement Act, draft language our witnesses will be discussing today, would build upon the down payment made by Congress following this storm toward restoring the U.S. as a leader in this field through expanded computing capacity and data assimilation techniques.

We can do better.

The people of Moore, Oklahoma received a tornado warning 16 minutes before the twister struck their town. Tornado forecasting is difficult and lead times for storms have become gradually better. The draft legislation would prioritize investments in technologies like multi-phased array radar, technology being developed at NOAA's National Severe Storms Laboratory in Oklahoma, which "has the potential to provide revolutionary improvements in... tornado... warning lead times and accuracy, reducing false alarms" and could move us toward the goal of being able to "warn on forecast."

We can do better.

We have seen the devastating effects that severe weather can have on this country, and this bill would establish a priority mission for all of NOAA to improve forecasts and warnings to protect lives and property. Recent studies suggest that even routine weather variability every year can have impact a large portion of the economy with hundreds of billions of dollars in consequences.
We can do better.

The Weather Forecasting Improvement Act is based upon a number of recommendations received last Congress - As the country faces serious satellite data gaps, it would encourage NOAA to systematically conduct cost-benefit assessments to ensure that we are getting the most bang for our buck in acquiring and procuring a mix of critical space-, air-, and ground-based observational data. As Dr. Berrien Moore, Director of the National Weather Center at the University of Oklahoma, explained to this Subcommittee, "NOAA needs to do a better job in conducting quantitative assessments on data use, cost, and value."

This draft would help remove barriers to NOAA's cooperation with parts of the weather enterprise, including upstream data options and downstream, value-added forecasting capabilities from the private sector. Dr. David Crain, President and CEO of GeoMetWatch, a company looking to develop critical sounding observations from a constellation of satellites, stated that "a commercial approach can provide the needed data years earlier and with minimal cost and risk."

It would balance NOAA's research portfolio by emphasizing weather research with the potential to protect lives and property. In 2012, NOAA barely spent one-third of the resources on weather research as it did on climate research.

This language would dedicate resources to transition next generation research into operational forecasting. As NOAA's Science Advisory Board stated last month, "Unless... science is transitioned into operations... NOAA will fail in its mission."

Unfortunately, NOAA was unable to testify in-person this morning, but they will be providing the Subcommittee with comments on forecasting improvements, and we look forward to their feedback informing this legislation and their future testimony on this and other topics.

I look forward to discussing these absolutely critical issues with our witnesses today, and learning about how we can restore U.S. leadership in weather forecasting.

I yield back the balance of my time, and recognize Ranking Member Bonamici for an opening statement.

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