

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



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**Statement of Rep. Randy Neugebauer (R-Texas)
Hearing on “Federal Efforts to Reduce the Impacts of Windstorms”**

Rep. Neugebauer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing today on federal efforts to reduce the impacts of windstorms. This is an extremely important topic, particularly in light of the devastating tornado that tore through Moore, Oklahoma. According to the National Weather Service, that tornado was the widest ever recorded and one of the strongest. I’m looking forward to hearing testimony from today’s witnesses about federal research and development priorities in relation to tornadoes and other windstorms.

In particular, I’d like to welcome Dr. Ernst Kiesling from the National Wind Institute at Texas Tech University. As a fellow Red Raider myself, I have seen firsthand the tremendous research that Dr. Kiesling and his colleagues are pursuing that will continue to help save lives and reduce property damage from windstorms.

Windstorms can be devastating: every year, there are about 80 deaths and 1,500 injuries from tornadoes. 2011 was an especially bad year, with 551 fatalities caused by tornadoes alone. The property destruction is also devastating. When a family loses their home in a windstorm, they don’t just have to rebuild their house—they have to rebuild their lives.

That’s why the research like that being done at the Texas Tech National Wind Institute and elsewhere is so critical. It is helping us better understand the mechanics of windstorms, and teaching us how to build stronger, safer shelters.

The National Science and Technology Council has stated that America’s primary focus on disaster response is “an impractical and inefficient strategy for dealing with these ongoing threats. Instead, communities must break the cycle of destruction and recovery by enhancing their disaster resilience.” This bill would help ensure that the federal government is adequately addressing disaster resilience and mitigation, which is critical to reducing the costs of disasters to taxpayers.

I first authored the bill that created NWIRP back in 2004. NWIRP helps to improve building codes, voluntary standards, and construction practices for buildings and homes. It also supports basic research to better understand windstorms, atmospheric science research and data collection, and the development of risk assessment tools and mitigation techniques. Since 2008 when the original authorization expired, NIST, NSF, NOAA, and FEMA have been conducting related activities, but have had no direction from Congress on the actual NWIRP program or what specific research it should be conducting.

My bill, H.R. 1786, is first and foremost a bill that ensures smart and efficient use of taxpayer dollars. It reauthorizes and improves NWIRP by clarifying research priorities, enhancing coordination between these agencies, and establishing stronger reporting criteria. The bill makes NIST the lead agency. This

will lead to a clearer mission for the program and ensure proper accountability to taxpayers. It will also prevent duplicative research across the agencies. It also creates a National Advisory Committee on windstorm impact reduction, made up of unpaid, non-federal employee experts to offer recommendations on the program and its priorities. This ensures that industry and scientific recommendations are taken into account when guiding the direction of NWIRP, leading to a leaner and more effective program. Lastly, it creates an Interagency Coordination Committee, chaired by the Director of NIST, to develop a strategic plan, coordinate budgets, and report on the progress of the program. This will help Congress keep better track of NWIRP and guarantee transparency and wise use of taxpayer dollars.

I'm looking forward to the testimony today and hope that the Committee will take up and pass H.R. 1786 as soon as possible. Thank you Mr. Chairman.