

**COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

Tracking the Storm at the National Hurricane Center

HEARING

July 19, 2007

**Statement of Subcommittee on Energy & Environment Ranking Member Bob Inglis
(SC-4)**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

For my home state of South Carolina and many others in coastal areas, the National Hurricane Center (NHC) is a critical national resource. The lives of individuals and families depend on the information the Center provides. Given the NHC's importance for protecting our citizens, we should carefully protect the integrity of the National Hurricane Center.

We may find that we are here today discussing a fairly straightforward personnel matter. It appears that the Administration put a highly recommended and well qualified director into the office of Hurricane Director. Thereafter, about half of the staff at the Hurricane Center signed a letter asking that Mr. Proenza be removed. Perhaps they were acting on some personal vendetta. Perhaps they just didn't like his management style.

In any event, the Administrator did the right thing by appointing an independent panel to investigate the situation. That panel was chaired by Dr. Jim Turner who will testify here today.

We can agree that the Mr. Proenza has a distinguished resume and a history of positive performance reviews. Because of his success as Southern Regional Director of the National Weather Service, he appeared qualified for the NHC Director position. In his new role, he became concerned about the potential loss of the QuickScat satellite. Some would agree with Mr. Proenza that QuickScat helps forecasters better understand the behavior of tropical storms; others would assert that Mr. Proenza exaggerated the impacts of a potential loss of QuickScat.

Mr. Proenza's management style will be discussed here today. We need a steady and reliable hand at the wheel at the National Hurricane Center. With the peak of hurricane season fast approaching, Admiral Lautenbacher was told that Mr. Proenza had become so disruptive that forecasters were saying they could no longer do their jobs.

We will hear today that Mr. Proenza's management style became such an issue that:

- his immediate supervisors lost confidence,
- his employees lost confidence,
- and the independent operational assessment team lost confidence in his ability to manage the Center.

We will hear that Admiral Lautenbacher decided that Mr. Proenza, as qualified as he had been at the outset, was miscast as the Director of the Center.

I hope that my colleagues and the press stay around to hear the testimony of Admiral Lautenbacher and Dr. Turner. Although it seems odd to not accord a senior Administration official the courtesy of testifying at the outset of this hearing today, I trust that we will all wait to form conclusions until all of the witnesses have testified. Thank you Mr. Chairman.