Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Environment Subcommittee Hearing
Protecting Lives and Property: Harnessing Innovative Technologies to Enhance Weather Forecasting
July 16, 2025

Good morning. Thank you to our Subcommittee Chairman, Mr. Franklin, for presiding over this timely hearing.

I'm also grateful to our witnesses for sharing their insights today, especially with the schedule changes caused by last week's House recess. Thank you for being here.

Today's discussion examines how burgeoning technologies can strengthen our nation's weather forecasting capabilities. This conversation is both timely and necessary. Recent events across the country remind us why this hearing matters: to protect lives and property.

Less than two weeks ago, a flash flood in Central Texas tragically claimed 132 lives, including over 30 children, with more than 100 people still missing. The Guadalupe River rose 26 feet in just 45 minutes after 8 to 20 inches of rain fell.

The sheer scale of this natural disaster is unfathomable—a wall of water nearly three stories high, carrying almost 11 million pounds of water every second.

This tragedy is devastating—for the families of those who were lost, for the communities that sustained significant damage in a matter of minutes, and for the nation as a whole, many of whom, myself included, have generational ties to the area that was flooded. This catastrophe has been deeply personal for me, as many of my grandchildren attend camp each year along the river that flooded. One of my granddaughters attended the first term of Camp Mystic, which ended just a week before the flood. Another granddaughter was supposed to be at the camp that weekend but missed it this year only because she needed knee surgery. Four of my grandsons were attending Camp Stewart, just a few miles from Camp Mystic, where I served as a counselor back in the 1960s. Thankfully, they all escaped harm.

Days later, another flash flood in New Mexico caused the Ruidoso River to rise 20 feet in less than an hour, tragically claiming the lives of two more children.

These events underscore the urgent need to improve our weather forecasting.

We must enhance our modeling capabilities to extend prediction lead times and increase accuracy in rainfall forecasts. But just as important as forecasting is ensuring warnings reach the right people in time.

In both disasters, the National Weather Service (NWS) issued timely and accurate alerts. Emergency communications were activated, and warnings were sent directly to cell phones and

weather radios. Still, those alerts were not enough to prevent the catastrophe that unfolded in the early morning hours of July 4th.

During the 115th Congress, this Committee had the foresight to advance legislation to address some of the shortcomings of the NWS's ways of doing things, the first real update of weather priorities since 1992. President Trump signed the Weather Research and Forecasting Act of 2017, which has spurred innovation in forecasting and created opportunities for greater involvement of the private sector. NOAA was authorized to develop a pilot program to purchase commercial weather data.

Artificial intelligence has progressed to a stage where it can be used in concert with traditional modeling techniques to provide even greater lead times to allow people to get to safety. However, the disasters that occurred earlier this month clearly demonstrate the need for us to do more. Unfortunately, the focus of our government over the last several years has been less about securing our present safety and more about handing out favors to special interest groups.

There is always room for improvement. This hearing will highlight where progress is being made and what further steps can be taken to advance our most critical mission: protecting lives and property.

I look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses and yield back the remainder of my time.