Opening Statement of Environment Subcommittee Chairman Scott Franklin

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

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for being here today. I am grateful that you were able to rearrange your calendars to testify today instead of last week when this hearing was initially scheduled. Given recent events, the importance of hearing your perspectives on our nation's weather enterprise cannot be overstated. This morning's hearing addresses a topic that affects hundreds of millions of Americans daily: the technological advancements that contribute to the enhancement of weather forecasting.

The recent floods in Texas and New Mexico, the tornado outbreaks in March and May, and, of course, the devastating wildfires in Southern California at the beginning of the year all highlight the need for higher-quality weather forecasting. For years, NOAA's mission has been to protect lives and property. However, as the world modernizes, this responsibility no longer rests solely on their shoulders.

A robust private sector that embraces and fosters various technologies and techniques is essential for our progress in all areas related to weather.

Today, we will hear from witnesses who utilize this raw weather data to inform the public about imminent storms, what the weather will be like in the days to come, and what conditions we can expect throughout an entire season.

From my conversations with farmers back home in Florida, I know that seasonal weather predictions are vital to American agriculture. Without accurate forecasts in this sector, decisions about seasonal planting and harvest timing are less efficient, which reduces yields of crops that are the backbone of our economy.

Floridians also recognize that accurate weather forecasts are crucial for their safety and well-being. Extended hurricane lead time, combined with more accurate tracking and intensity predictions over the last decade, has saved countless lives and businesses, largely in part due to the work put in by NOAA's Hurricane Hunter aircraft, based out of Lakeland. In 2024 alone, they flew 67 missions totaling over 520 flight hours.

In the new era of artificial intelligence (AI), leveraging advanced modeling will enhance the accuracy and timeliness of our forecasts. This will give our nation a competitive advantage in industry development and resilience. Furthermore, it will help counter adversaries like China and Russia, who are already advancing their own AI programs that will ultimately undermine the security and economic prosperity of the United States.

Back in 2017, this Committee laid the groundwork for NOAA to engage in extended private-public partnerships. The Weather Act of 2017, signed by President Trump, directed NOAA to establish a pilot program for purchasing commercial data. This has proven to be an overwhelming success, and I am proud to help lead the charge moving forward through its eventual reauthorization.

As we continue to innovate, it is important that the investments we make have the most effective path to commercialization. Fostering collaboration between NOAA, academic institutions, and the private sector enables the federal government to procure the most cost-effective information, resulting in services that maximize impact.

I am committed to working with Committee members to develop a comprehensive legislative approach that addresses the expansion of this critical sector.

I would like to thank our witnesses again for being here, and I look forward to hearing each of your testimonies.