

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Environment Subcommittees Hearing
2318 Rayburn House Office Building
July 9, 2013; 10:00 AM

“Markup of: H.R. 2413, Weather Forecasting Improvement Act of 2013”

Mr. Chairman,

On June 26, 2013 you chaired the second subcommittee hearing on restoring U.S. leadership in weather forecasting. Thank you for holding that hearing. The testimony was intelligent and constructive. We had a very distinguished panel of witnesses, all of whom provided extensive input and expertise about ways we can improve weather forecasting.

I was encouraged by your willingness to work together on this important issue, and following the June 26th hearing I asked my staff to continue working with your office and the Committee’s Majority staff to revise the bill to reflect the expertise gathered during that hearing.

Then on July 3rd I heard that a markup had been scheduled for today, July 9th. This rushed timeline, especially over a holiday recess, did not give us time to work together to improve the bill.

Mr. Chairman, I still want to work on this bill in a bipartisan way and I ask that we make a concerted effort, before we get to the Full Committee, to find language that serves the public safety interests of all of our constituents and is supported by the weather enterprise. Will you please commit to that? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The experts who testified raised several issues that should be addressed; here are a few.

First, we all agree that public safety is critical. But not one witness who testified stated that weather, which is about a two-week time frame, should be a higher research priority at NOAA than climate, which is about what happens beyond two weeks. In fact, experts say that it will be difficult to improve weather forecasting without improving our understanding of climactic forces.

Americans living along our coasts won’t be safer if we reduce progress on seasonal tropical storm and hurricane warnings. As witnesses at the June 26 hearing noted, these storm forecasts are heavily dependent on accurate climate and ocean modeling, which appears to be weakened under this bill. Hurricanes and tropical storms are terribly damaging to our country, so it’s inconceivable that we would move a bill that purports to improve weather forecasting but would simultaneously hinder NOAA’s long-term forecasting for these storms. And it won’t help farmers if we require NOAA to work on making five-day weather forecasts marginally more precise at the expense of reducing our progress on making useful seasonal drought forecasts.

Second, it’s problematic that a bill to improve weather forecasting seems to largely ignore the National Weather Service, focusing instead on the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research, the line office responsible for research within NOAA.

NWS runs its own multi-million dollar R&D enterprise and its own multi-million dollar research to operations program. This bill appears to ignore those efforts. I am concerned that the bill does an

inadequate job of something the witnesses emphasized – the need to bring better coordination across OAR and NWS.

The witnesses provided many useful suggestions about how to improve the research to operations and operations to research efforts at NOAA. There are low-cost ways to achieve high impact in generating innovation in NOAA's forecasting efforts and in integrating advice from the broader community into NOAA's work.

Instead, we appear to be authorizing unnecessary expenditures. For example, the bill authorizes OAR to spend \$20 million on a joint technology transfer initiative, but NWS currently already spends almost \$80 million on research to operations. Do we need a second initiative located in an office that does not do operational forecasts? This seems to empower the wrong office and also appears redundant and potentially wasteful.

Mr. Chairman, because this markup was noticed immediately prior to the July 4th holiday, we have had very little time to turn these ideas into legislative language and, importantly, to vet that language with the weather community. I certainly hope that there will be time for that before moving to a Full Committee markup.

As it stands, the bill we are marking up today remains flawed, a conclusion I reached listening to the testimony of the expert witnesses who were invited by the Minority *and* by the Majority. This is an area where we have a chance to do something good for the public and truly bipartisan if my colleagues in the Majority are willing.

I want to emphasize how concerned I am about this rushed timeline. Members have not even had a chance to submit questions for the record following our June 26 hearing, much less receive answers back. The record of that hearing is still open. This bill is important to the safety of the public – why rush it and risk not getting it right?

Because of the rushed timeframe for this subcommittee markup, I plan to submit substantive amendments at the Full Committee markup. I remain optimistic that we can improve both public safety and the weather enterprise if we can work together.

Thank you and I yield back.