Opening Statemen of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Full Committee Hearing – "The Future of Forecasting: Building a Weather-Ready Nation on All Fronts"

October 14, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson, for holding today's hearing. And thank you to all our witnesses for offering your insight into our nation's weather forecasting future. As you know, improving our forecasting abilities and making our forecasts even more useful has been a high priority for me as Ranking Member of this Committee. I appreciate that Dr. Uccellini shares this commitment and has dedicated his career at the National Weather Service to better serving the public.

On a daily basis, NWS tools and services produce critical information to businesses across the nation. Around this time of year in Oklahoma, NWS forecasts alert farmers and ranchers to the first freeze of the season, helping us plan for the weeks ahead. Towns and cities rely on forecasts to plan for inclement weather. And the forecasts issued by local weather offices provide lifesaving information in the event of severe weather.

In recent years, NWS has focused on efforts to become a Weather-Ready Nation. This has primarily been done by implementing Impact-based Decision Support Services, where NWS forecast offices provide forecast advice to local officials before and during a weather-related emergency. These efforts have improved communication to the public, helping families better understand the effects a weather event may have on them personally.

Dr. Uccellini and NWS have also focused on the implementation of the National Blend of Models, a method which improved the speed and accuracy at which meteorologists can issue forecasts. By bringing together both NWS and non-NWS numerical weather prediction data, an accurate, consistent model can be a starting point for forecasters across the nation.

But despite the many successes of NWS, no government office is perfect, and challenges always remain. At the forefront of my mind is how NOAA and NWS can more efficiently utilize and engage in commercial data buys to improve our nations' weather models. As made evident by the National Blend of Models, U.S. weather

models cannot achieve their full capabilities without support from the private weather enterprise. Another challenge we are facing is inspiring and training the next generation of STEM and meteorology students. Improving our models, data, and information won't help us if there are no professionals to utilize them in the next decade.

That is why I am pleased to welcome Mr. Erik Salna, Associate Director for Education and Outreach for the International Hurricane Research Center at Florida International University, to the witness panel.

As a Weather-Ready Nation Ambassador and someone who works closely with university students, he can offer a unique perspective on the future of forecasting in our nation, especially when it comes to engaging the community and the next generation workforce.

Before I close, I'd like to thank Dr. Uccellini for his decades of service to the federal government. After a 43-year career in public service, he will be retiring at the start of the new year. This change in leadership makes now an opportune time to reflect on the progress we've made and what challenges NWS should tackle next.

I hope to use today's hearing to learn from all of our expert witness on what the next challenges might be. With that, Madam Chair, I yield back.