



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Full Committee Markup of H.R. 5781, H.R. 1437, and H.R. 5324

November 16, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson. This morning we are considering 3 bills. I wish I could say that all of the bills under consideration are bipartisan, but unfortunately, I cannot.

Over the last three years, we have worked together on the Science Committee to produce thoughtful, consensus legislation to advance the competitiveness of the United States and address national challenges. We have been deliberative and collaborative in drafting our legislation.

Since I became Ranking Member, I've made it a priority to return this Committee to an atmosphere of mutual respect where we can work together to achieve our shared goals. My friend Chairwoman Johnson has been a tremendous partner in that effort, and I think our results speak for themselves.

We've passed dozens of bipartisan bills on research and development, conservation, STEM education, and advanced technologies. Last year we passed the first comprehensive update of our energy policy in more than a decade. This year we developed landmark R&D bills to double our basic research investments at NSF, DOE, and NIST.

This kind of valuable legislation doesn't always make the most headlines, but it does make a real difference. We're able to do this because we don't operate like other Committees. And while we may not be able to reconcile our differences on every bill we consider, we aren't trying to score political points against each other.

Two of the three bills on the agenda today are truly bipartisan committee products that have been through our usual collaborative process, with committee staff working across the aisle and alongside all Members of this Committee to develop good proposals. The PRECIP Act and the NOAA Weather Radio Modernization Act are thoughtful bills, which have been informed by stakeholder feedback and involved extensive discussions and negotiations between our staff. I will discuss these bills more when brought up for consideration.

Unfortunately, the National Wildland Fire Risk Reduction Program Act has not been through that process. Wildfires are a critical issue in the West and Midwest. Members

on both sides of the aisle want to do productive work to mitigate their damage. So this could have been a productive and bipartisan bill.

Instead, the bill was developed behind closed doors by the Democrats with little to no input from Republicans on the committee. The behind-the-scenes partisanship on this bill was unnecessary, unprecedented and counterproductive to a healthy legislative environment at this committee.

Instead of working together, Republican staff weren't given the draft bill text until just days before it was introduced. We were given little opportunity to provide input or improvements ahead of time. So that's why we'll be offering a number of amendments today.

The process didn't have to be this way. Wildfires know no political boundaries. I can't think of a more pressing issue for our Members in the West. I would have thought if any issue could rise above politics, it would be addressing preventing and reducing wildfires and saving lives and property. For instance, California Representative Mike Garcia has been a leader on this issue on our Committee. A Member with a district deeply impacted by wildland fires and a prime example of the urban-wildland interface, he introduced a bipartisan bill in August: the "Fire Information and Reaction Enhancement Act" or the "FIRE Act."

His legislation improves NOAA's wildfire forecasting capabilities, and was developed with input from NOAA, and with the support of numerous stakeholders. It has strong bipartisan support and a number of Democrats have cosponsored it. It's unfortunate that his bill could not have been incorporated into this legislation today. But the gentleman will offer an amendment to do so later in the markup.

I understand that this partisanship is typical for some Committees in Congress, but I believe the Science Committee can and should be better than that Members like serving on the Science Committee because we're the "fun committee", tackling the problems of the future. Let's not lose sight of our Committee's mission to harness innovation to improve the lives of all Americans.

So that all being said, today's markup is going to take a little longer than it should have. We have a number of members offering thoughtful, productive amendments, to try and improve the underlying legislation. We'll get through today's markup, and then I look forward to hopefully moving ahead for the rest of the Congress together to advance science and technology.

Thank you, I yield back Madam Chair.