



Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Full Committee Markup
H.R. 7813, NOAA Weather Radio Modernization Act
March 18, 2026

Thank you all for joining us at today's markup.

We are here to consider H.R. 7813, the NOAA Weather Radio Modernization Act, a bill that will strengthen and revitalize one of the most important public safety communication systems in the United States.

For decades, the National Weather Service (NWS) has carried out a mission that is both simple and profound: the protection of life and property. Accurate forecasts save lives—but only when that information reaches the people who need it, when they need it.

Over several Congresses, this Committee held hearings highlighting the importance of weather forecasting and the broader U.S. weather enterprise.

Through those hearings, we received testimony from a wide range of experts and examined both the strengths and the shortcomings of our forecasting and warning systems.

One concern surfaced repeatedly—the gap between producing accurate forecasts and reliable communication of critical warnings to local emergency managers and everyday citizens.

Forecasting alone is not enough.

That is where NOAA Weather Radio plays a vital role.

The NOAA Weather Radio All Hazards network is comprised of more than 1,000 stations across all 50 states, covering approximately 95 percent of the U.S. population, including coastal and adjacent waterways. It remains an essential source of information for communities across the country—including districts like mine, where the network currently operates in Port Houston.

When power fails, cell service drops, or internet connectivity disappears, NOAA Weather Radio often remains one of the last reliable ways to receive life-saving alerts.

The tragic flooding at Camp Mystic in my home state of Texas on July 4th last year serves as a painful reminder of why reliable warning systems matter. Even with substantial lead time for flood warnings, too many lives were lost when crucial information did not effectively reach those making evacuation decisions.

Events like these underscore the need to improve how warnings are delivered and ensure the systems behind them are modern, resilient, and accessible.

The NOAA Weather Radio Modernization Act addresses that need.

This legislation will modernize critical technology by repairing or replacing aging and broken transmitters, digitizing broadcasts, and migrating certain operational functions to secure, cloud-based systems. It also directs NOAA to consult with private-sector partners and end users to ensure the next generation of Weather Radio remains efficient and reliable.

Simply put, when it comes to life-saving alerts, anything short of complete and reliable coverage is unacceptable.

This bill also enhances flood warning capabilities by directing NOAA and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) to develop flash flood emergency standards for people living in high-risk flood plains. These communities deserve clearer information about rainfall intensity and how quickly floodwaters may rise.

NOAA must also ensure it has the personnel needed to maintain a world-class weather forecasting operation. Staffing shortages at the National Weather Service have been a challenge for decades.

This bill addresses that issue by providing direct hire authority, allowing the agency to recruit and onboard essential scientists and forecasters more quickly.

With these tools, NWS will be better positioned to fill critical roles and sustain the expertise required to deliver accurate and timely forecasts. That capability is also important for national security, as weather forecasting supports military operations, aviation, maritime commerce, and disaster response.

Building on the strong foundation established by this Committee through the Weather Act, the devastating Texas floods of 2025 made clear that further improvements are needed to ensure life-saving weather information reaches those tasked with safeguarding our communities.

This legislation equips NOAA with the tools necessary to carry out its core mission and further enhances our nation's ability to protect lives and property through improved emergency preparedness.

I encourage my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation, and I look forward to working with Senator Cruz on advancing this bill—and the broader Weather Act Reauthorization package—to ensure that communities like mine in Texas, and communities across the United States, are better prepared for severe weather and future tragedies can be prevented.