



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON **SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Full Committee Hearing:

“Innovation in Disaster Prevention: Advancing Technology for Prediction and Response”

September 15, 2026

Good morning. Thank you to Chairman Babin for holding this important hearing and thank you to the witnesses for coming to share your expertise and insights with us today.

The topic of today’s hearing is timely. NOAA has announced that we’ve just experienced the hottest summer on record, and a historic “super El Niño” event is expected to bring more extreme weather events this fall. Climate change is intensifying natural hazards around the nation, and we need to prepare by investing in our capabilities for forecasting, detection, monitoring, warning, and response.

Coming from California, I know how quickly natural events can escalate into hazards that threaten public safety. Wildfires, earthquakes, landslides, and drought all pose ongoing risks to my constituents. Just last February, an atmospheric river occurred at the end of a severe fire season in my District. Torrential rainfall onto the recently burned areas caused landslides, debris flows, and flash flooding across the region. Forecasting models failed to indicate the storm’s severity or where it would make landfall, limiting evacuation time. Emergency officials should not have to resort to giving door-to-door evacuation notices. We must improve our ability to detect and communicate risks before they become active hazards.

Science and technology are fundamental to addressing the new reality of extreme hazards. Our current hazard prediction and alert systems have been built through interagency partnerships, which leverage institutional expertise and federal tools and data to inform risk management.

While industry is using AI and machine learning to improve our current detection systems, dedicated research helps us understand how natural hazards occur, who they impact, and how we can reduce risk and improve response. Translating the science into operational tools, forecasts, and warning systems will require collaborations across government, academia, the public, and private sectors.

We’ve seen the power of these partnerships in California. CAL FIRE is a leader in fire innovation, adopting next-generation wildfire technology, like AI-powered camera networks, to enhance firefighter safety and efficiency. Programs like FireSense at NASA Ames can also serve

as a model by leveraging technical capabilities at our research agencies to directly support the operational decision making of our federal and state wildfire management agencies. I am excited to hear from Dr. Falkowski, who previously led the FireSense project at NASA Ames, about how we can move these technological innovations to support operational agencies and decision-makers.

While there are many successful federal programs, I am deeply concerned about the trajectory of disaster research and recovery due to reckless cuts and partisan decision-making from the Trump Administration.

The Administration has weakened the federal emergency management apparatus across several key agencies, including NASA, NSF, NOAA, NIST, and FEMA, by defunding valuable programs and research or pushing out agency expertise on these issues. In the past 19 months, the President has slashed the fundamental research that informs our hazard forecasts, haphazardly consolidated federal firefighting resources, and withheld disaster aid as he pleases. It's become clear that public safety is not a priority for this Administration.

I am most concerned about instances where the Trump Administration has withheld disaster response funding from states that have elected Democratic leaders. Last year, the Administration withheld important wildfire funding from Los Angeles after the most destructive wildfire in the city's history. This past February, this Administration overruled their own regional FEMA and NOAA offices to deny hundreds of millions of dollars in major disaster aid to four Democratic-led states: New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island.

We cannot allow federal disaster response to become a partisan game. Doing so will certainly lead to a race to the bottom that neither Democratic- nor Republican-led states can afford.

Thank you again to our witnesses for being here today. I yield back.