



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing – “NASA’s Earth Science and Climate Change Activities: Current Roles and Future Opportunities”

May 19, 2021

Thank you for holding this hearing, Mr. Chairman. Today’s hearing is an important opportunity for the Committee to engage in oversight of NASA’s current and future earth science and climate activities. I’m looking forward to discussing how the agency can best utilize resources within existing budgets and how it would use additional resources.

NASA’s mandate to research Earth’s atmosphere dates back to the passage of NASA’s Organic Act in 1958, which stated NASA shall seek the “expansion of human knowledge of phenomena in the atmosphere and space.” That mission has evolved through the decades as our technical capacity and scientific knowledge have increased. Today, the Earth Science Division at NASA oversees a broad range of activities and missions, including managing a variety of ongoing Earth observation missions, planning future missions, and sharing the data collected from these missions with the scientific community and the public.

NASA is currently operating more than a dozen Earth science missions in tandem with international partners and other federal agencies, and has a dozen more missions slated to launch in the decade ahead. These missions provide a new generation of satellites and instruments to monitor and provide data about Earth’s changing climate to the scientific community.

Today’s hearing represents an opportunity to evaluate NASA’s Earth science and climate partnerships within the federal government, with international partners, and with the private sector. This Committee has an obligation to consider whether these partnerships work in the most effective manner and if the agency would benefit from new approaches to these partnerships. Our panel represents a cross-section of government, the non-profit sector, and industry. And that is appropriate as all three sectors must work together to provide the best knowledge to the scientific community.

Today's hearing is timely. The commercial remote sensing industry has come a long way in a very short period of time. New remote sensing technologies have made images of Earth more accessible. The images and data made available by commercial providers are of great value to any number of consumers, whether it is public safety officials in the west managing forests, or farmers in Oklahoma growing crops.

As the author of NOAA's commercial weather data buy program and the commercial data buy program in the space weather legislation passed last Congress, I have long championed the ability of the commercial remote sensing industry to fill gaps in federal earth observation abilities. To be clear, this does not mean that the commercial sector would replace the government's role, but instead complement it and provide more cost-effective and novel solutions. We will hear testimony today about how the commercial sector is helping fill this need as well as how NASA could increase its utilization.

I want to thank our witnesses today for sharing their perspectives on this topic. I look forward to a productive discussion about how this Committee can ensure NASA's Earth Science and climate activities can be made more efficient and cost-effective moving forward.

I yield back the balance of my time.