



Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Environment Subcommittee Hearing – Advancing Earth System Science and
Stewardship at NOAA

September 23, 2021

Thank you, Chairwoman Sherrill. And I echo my colleagues' welcome to Administrator Spinrad. It's great to have you here today.

NOAA has a broad array of responsibilities ranging from weather forecasting and climate prediction, to ocean and atmospheric observation. NOAA's work benefits America's farmers and ranchers, coastal communities, and disaster personnel. Land use planners, weather forecasters, and everyday citizens rely on NOAA's work daily. NOAA's in-house research is groundbreaking and the publicly available environmental data they collect has an immense economic impact.

That is why I am eager to hear from NOAA Administrator Dr. Rick Spinrad today. As NOAA's former Chief Scientist and head of the Office of Oceanic and Atmospheric Research (OAR), I know that the Administrator is very familiar with this Committee and the work we do. In fact, to give you a sense of how intertwined our paths have been, Administrator Spinrad was present in his official OAR capacity at the 2006 dedication of the National Weather Center in Norman, Oklahoma. There's a great picture of him right next to Jim Cantore that I'll have to share with everyone some time.

All of this is to say I believe that the Administrator speaks the Science Committee's language. While we might not agree on the exact way to do certain things, I think we can engage in a meaningful discussion where both sides are heard and valued. At the end of the day, weather is nonpartisan. Severe events don't travel along party lines.

That is why I will remind my colleagues – just as I have done in years past when Republicans were in control – that the Administration's top priority should be aligned with NOAA's core priority: protecting life and property. So today, I look forward to hearing from the Administrator on how he envisions advancing NOAA's mission and improving its ability to save lives.

One issue I'd like to address today is commercial data supply. NOAA provides tools, data, and operations that are applicable to every single district in the country. Whether

it's a rancher in Oklahoma, a fishing captain in Florida, or a firefighter in Oregon, they are all dependent on information NOAA provides.

But as more private sector companies enter the picture with the ability to gather their own environmental and weather data, NOAA must seek to balance its capabilities with supplemental commercial data. Simply put, NOAA is no longer the only provider in the market. And, often times, NOAA's collection of data costs more than acquiring the same quality of data from a private sector company.

We can't assume an endlessly increasing budget. At some point, the balloon will pop. Believe me, I want NOAA to be successful across its mission areas. We can best ensure that by prioritizing funding and standing up programs to acquire data that private industry cannot yet collect while preparing for a commercially competitive future.

Again, I want to thank Administrator Spinrad for being here today and Chairwoman Sherrill for having this hearing. I yield back the balance of my time.