



Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

Submitted for the Record

Winning in Weather: U.S. Competitiveness in Forecasting and Modeling

March 6, 2024

I want to thank the gentleman from Ohio, Chairman Miller, for holding today's hearing.

This hearing couldn't come at a more crucial time. Last week, the Smokehouse Creek fire burned over 1 million acres in Western Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle. This has earned it the unpleasant distinction of being the second largest wildfire in U.S. history.

While evaluation is still on going, early reports indicate that about 500 structures were destroyed, thousands of cattle were killed, and tragically one life was lost. Last week, I took some time to drive through the western most parts of my district to see the damage, and I can tell you that many families will struggle to fully recover for years to come.

Where I'm from, land is your livelihood. Even if your house is still standing, you can lose the very backbone of your career and income if your property is damaged or thrown off from the delicate balance you have cultivated.

If it wasn't for some strong south to north wind at just the right time last week, I could have been in that category. I had to move cattle into fields that were less likely to burn if the fire kept moving our way. It's not a fun activity, but a necessary one to protect my family's business.

This personal experience very much relates to today's hearing. I looked at the Oklahoma Mesonet to see the most up to date conditions in my area. I closely monitored the National Weather Service's fire weather outlooks for the coming days, so I knew what to expect. And I made critical decisions based on the weather data, models, and forecasts that were available to me.

It's been seven years since the passage of the Weather Act of 2017. The tools and data I used last week are more accurate and readily available than they were before that bill. But I believe there is more we can do for the U.S. weather enterprise to be at the forefront of forecasting and modeling.

The Weather Act Reauthorization of 2023 and H.R. 4866, the Fire Weather Development Act of 2023, are both bills that passed with bipartisan support out of this Committee. Both bills will further improve the weather data, models, and forecasts to meet the unique needs of our country and protect lives and property.

I thank our witnesses for sharing their expertise with us and I look forward to a productive discussion. Thank you and I yield back Mr. Chairman.