



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Full Committee Hearing

The Future of Forecasting: Building a Weather-Ready National on All Fronts

Thursday, October 14, 2021

Good morning, and thank you to our witnesses for joining us here today.

In April 2011, a tornado outbreak tore through Mississippi, Alabama, and neighboring states. Over 300 lives were lost. This was despite an average lead time of over 20 minutes before the tornados arrived. What went wrong? The answer lies largely in the way risk was communicated to the communities, and how they responded. These tragedies spurred the National Weather Service to begin implementing its plan to build a “Weather-Ready Nation.” The vision was to make communities ready, responsive, and resilient to such threats.

Over 8 years later in October 2019, a tornado outbreak tore through the South-Central U.S. An EF3 tornado hit the Dallas suburbs and became the costliest tornado in Texas history. However, unlike the tornadoes from 2011, there were no life-threatening injuries or deaths. While luck certainly played a role, the real difference was the ability of the Weather Service forecasters to *communicate* the risk so communities could prepare. This is called Impact-Based Decision Support Services – or IDSS. IDSS is just one of the many improvements that have been made at the National Weather Service over the past decade.

The Weather Service has built important relationships with its core partners. These include emergency managers, academia, the private sector, and State, local, and Tribal governments. These partners work hand-in-hand with Weather Service forecasters to provide the public with critical, actionable weather and climate information. Developments in science and technology are propelling us into the future of weather forecasting. Additionally, the Weather Service’s forecast accuracy has improved markedly.

We owe much of this progress to our distinguished witness, Dr. Louis Uccellini. Dr. Uccellini will be retiring as Director of the National Weather Service at the end of the year. He has served our country for 43 years. For the past 32 years, he has been at the National Weather Service. And for the past 9 years, he has served as its director. He has had an impressive career, and whoever succeeds him as Director will have very large shoes to fill.

But despite the successes of the Weather Service under his tenure, there is still work to be done. Over the past decade, there have been numerous external reviews of Weather Service workforce and operations. Each report outlined areas of improvement and growth, and some issued recommendations. We will discuss some of the recent Government Accountability Office reports on the Weather Service today. I commend the Weather Service for its willingness address the findings of these reports and continuously working to improve.

World-class scientists are the beating heart of the Weather Service. However, over the past decade, there has been a high vacancy rate, especially among meteorologists. This has led to stress, fatigue, and reduced morale. The Weather Service has taken steps to address these workforce issues, but more work must be done. I cannot emphasize enough that the Committee would like to see these vacancies filled, and they must be filled soon.

Today, we'll discuss progress at the Weather Service and where there is still room for growth. We'll examine how to best position the Weather Service to provide robust IDSS across the country. And we'll discuss what additional resources the Weather Service may need to ensure that we are a truly Weather-Ready Nation.

I hope today's hearing will serve as a roadmap for the next Director of the National Weather Service. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back.