



Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Full Committee Markup of H.R. 7569, H.R. 7361, H.R. 7289, and H.R. 7180

May 17, 2022

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson, for holding today's markup of bipartisan environment, research, and cybersecurity bills.

First up is H.R. 7569, the Energy Cybersecurity University Leadership Act of 2022. It's never been more critical to ensure the cybersecurity of our nation's energy sector. In recent months, our liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry has faced numerous cyberattacks by Russian actors. And in March, the President and FBI warned us of credible threats to our energy infrastructure.

The Department of Energy plays a central role in safeguarding this infrastructure and has launched some new initiatives recently to address these issues. That's why Ranking Member Weber and I recently wrote to Secretary Granholm to ask for more information about the Department's work in this area.

H.R. 7569 is one more avenue to strengthen our energy cybersecurity. This legislation directs the Secretary of Energy to establish a program to provide financial assistance to graduate students and postdoctoral researchers pursuing work related to cybersecurity and energy infrastructure.

The program will also provide them with valuable research traineeship experiences at the National Laboratories and utilities. Additionally, the bill ensures we are connecting with students across the country by conducting outreach to historically Black colleges and universities, Tribal Colleges or Universities, and minority-serving institutions.

This is important legislation that will help address expanding vulnerabilities in our energy-related critical infrastructure by strengthening the next generation of our energy cybersecurity workforce.

Next, we have H.R. 7361, the National Weather Service Communication Improvement Act. The National Weather Service uses an instant messaging system, known as NWS Chat, to communicate quickly with forecast offices and emergency officials.

NWS Chat is a legacy, web-based system developed internally by NWS decades ago. In recent years, it has experienced failures during severe weather events when a large number of users log in at once.

After the last two years of remote and hybrid work, I'm sure all of us know just how frustrating it is when communications go down during our busiest times. But when NWS Chat goes down, it doesn't just delay our debates on bills – it can endanger lives.

Living in Tornado Alley, I am very familiar with how quickly storms can form and change direction. Every second counts during weather emergencies, and we cannot afford to keep a failing system.

This bill authorizes the Weather Service to upgrade to a commercial off-the-shelf solution. Not only will it improve reliability, but it will also allow NWS to take advantage of continuous technology upgrades. I'd like to thank Ranking Member Feenstra for introducing this bill.

The next bill before us is H.R. 7289, the Federal PFAS Research Evaluation Act. PFAS refers to a large group of high-strength, high-durability chemicals used in industry and consumer products. Because of their durability, they don't break down easily and last a long time in the environment. In some instances, that creates hazards to human health.

This bill addresses that by directing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to enter into an agreement with the National Academies to conduct two studies.

The first is to better understand human exposure, behavior, and toxicity of PFAS. It will allow us to better address research and knowledge gaps in federal research as identified by the National Academies in 2020.

The second study is focused on understanding the extent and implications of PFAS contamination, as well as research needed to manage and treat contamination, and develop safe alternatives. Together, these studies will help us better address PFAS using the best available science.

Finally, we'll consider Rep. Gonzalez's bill, H.R. 7180, the Brycen Gray and Ben Price COVID-19 Cognitive Research Act.

The bill is named for two men who died by suicide after suffering neurological problems caused by COVID-19. Tragically, there have been numerous instances of psychosis developing after COVID illnesses. This neurological disease is not well understood, and this bill will help to change that.

The bill directs NSF to support research on the long-term mental health effects of COVID, particularly in adolescents. It also instructs NSF to commission a National Academies study on the disruption of cognitive processes associated with COVID.

Research on mental health issues associated with COVID has been progressing as we continue to learn more about the long-term effects of the disease. This bill will help accelerate these efforts, to better inform the public and medical community. And hopefully, it will prevent more tragic deaths.

I'd like to thank Rep. Gonzalez for his work on this important issue and I look forward to getting this bill and the others on the docket today passed into law quickly.

I yield the balance of my time.