OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Committee on Science, Space, & Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
"Private Sector Weather Forecasting: Assessing Products and Technologies"
June 8, 2016

People in Texas are very familiar with the impact weather has on our daily lives. In just the last few weeks, terrible floods have taken the lives of more than a dozen people. Weather has a universal impact and it is only through reliable and accurate forecasts that we are able to act to protect ourselves. That is why the mission of the National Weather Service is to "provide weather, water, and climate data, forecasts and warnings for the protection of life and property and enhancement of the national economy." So while this hearing is part of an ongoing dialogue regarding the role of the commercial weather industry in our weather enterprise, we must keep in mind that the protection of our citizens and national security are inherently government functions.

That is why, in 2003, the National Academies "Fair Weather Report" provided recommendations of how to strengthen the existing partnership between the Weather Service, academia, and the private sector, and not simply strip away government functions as some may suggest. Despite the claims by some that we must "disaggregate" the weather enterprise, it is very clear to me that the existing partnership between these three sectors has made our weather forecasts more reliable and more accurate.

We will hear from some of the witnesses that NWS should focus on its "core" functions, and trust that private companies are capable of meeting the critical needs of the public. Are those companies then assuming the burden of responsibility that the Federal Government currently bears in meeting its core mission? Will private companies be held liable for negligent errors or poor performance? Will Congress have oversight over those companies? Will private companies be as transparent with their data and models as the Federal Government? What happens to our international obligations? How will consumers know which forecasts are reliable? Who is responsible for setting the standard? We must have answers to these difficult questions before we can properly consider altering the role of the Weather Service.

I would have hoped the Majority would have invited NOAA and the Weather Service to answer these questions and respond to these claims. I look forward to hearing their perspective at another time.