Opening Statement of
The Honorable Ralph Hall
National Imperatives for Earth and Climate Science Research and Applications Investments over the Next Decade
February 13, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling today's hearing to examine the recently released Decadal Survey on Earth Sciences produced by the National Academies. This report, which provides strategic advice to the government on the scope and goals of future Earth observing missions, especially those flown by NASA and NOAA, will be help guide federal investment decisions now and in the years to come.

I want to begin by thanking Dr. Anthes and Dr. Moore, and all your colleagues that served with you on the National Academies committee. Drafting the first-ever such report could not have been easy, but I am certain the community is stronger, and perhaps more cohesive as a result, and I hope you'll tell your friends and colleagues that we are grateful for their hard work.

Governor Geringer, thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to be with us today to describe how remote sensing data and products are used by industry and government. I want to add, parenthetically, that in my state of Texas, and for many residents in the western states, monitoring and measuring drought conditions is rapidly gaining importance. During the last Congress I was able to work with my friends here in the House to draft and pass a bill establishing the National Integrated Drought Information System, and I'm glad the President agreed to sign it into law.

But having said that, to many in this room, weather forecasting products are about all we understand. Governor, we look forward to your testimony about the numerous other applications of remote sensing information.

Beyond articulating the science questions and missions, the survey challenges government to reassess the amount of funding dedicated to earth science. It urges government to increase investment in NASA's Earth Sciences program by $500 million a year, about a 33 percent increase over current levels. This presents the Administration and Congress with a tremendous challenge. It's no mystery to everyone in this room that NASA is struggling to afford its current slate of programs, from human spaceflight to aeronautics, astrophysics, planetary sciences, and heliophysics. Redirecting funding from any of these activities is not an option. Either NASA maintains the status quo, with perhaps marginal adjustments in content to its Earth Sciences program, or its topline funding should be increased. I strongly prefer the latter.

The report also recommends new missions for NOAA that would total $565 million over the next ten years. I hope the witnesses will help us understand what weather forecasting improvements these missions would provide and why the Decadal Survey recommends them.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, I do want to be clear; I support the Decadal Survey and its recommendations. It lays out a course of research that should be followed. It raises questions that are of immediate importance to our way of living, and if fully implemented, it will provide planning tools that will help future generations monitor, and mitigate the effects of changes to Earth's weather systems. Unfortunately, in the current budget climate I fear we cannot fully implement the recommendations and in that vein I intend to ask hard questions today about which of the recommendations and missions are most important.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and yield back the balance of my time.