

**Opening Statement**  
**Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

Full Committee Markup

H.R. 1786 – *National Windstorm Impact Reduction Act Reauthorization of 2014*

February 28, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Smith. This morning we are considering legislation to reauthorize the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program – or NWIRP.

The last few years have been devastating years for natural disasters across the country. According to the National Weather Service, severe weather has caused an average of 278 fatalities and over 24 billion dollars of property damage per year, over the last 10 years. Hurricane Ike, which made landfall in my state of Texas in 2008, was responsible for over a hundred deaths and tens of billions of dollars in damages. Last year, there were massive tornadoes across the Midwest, including in Moore, Oklahoma, that resulted in loss of life and significant economic losses. And, Hurricane Irene in 2011 and Superstorm Sandy in 2012 caused widespread destruction and death along the Eastern seaboard.

NWIRP is an important program that can reduce the vulnerability of our communities to natural disasters. This program can help us build stronger and safer communities before a disaster occurs rather than after. When we discussed this bill at the Subcommittee, the Members on my side of the aisle raised some concerns about the bill. I shared those concerns. I think it is important that we authorize the NWIRP agencies adequately, allow room for the program to grow, and include social science research in the program.

I am pleased that the process of getting from Subcommittee to Full Committee today was a fair, productive and bipartisan process and I want to thank Chairman Smith and Mr. Neugebauer for working with us to address some of our concerns with the legislation. The manager's amendment addresses many of our concerns. It includes an increase to the FEMA authorization level. FEMA is the NWIRP agency tasked with taking the research conducted at other agencies and developing mitigation techniques and public outreach. It is important to ensure that they have the resources they need to be effective.

The manager's amendment also ensures that social science research plays an important role in windstorm preparation and mitigation. Often in a compromise, like this one, you do not get everything you would like. I would have liked to see increases in the authorization levels across the board. This bill includes a lower total authorization level than what was authorized for this program in Fiscal Year 2008.

When the last few years have been devastating years for windstorms—including Superstorm Sandy and the tornado outbreak last May that struck parts of Texas and Oklahoma—it is difficult to understand why we would cut the total authorization level for this important program. I also would have liked to see room for the program to grow. Unfortunately, this bill includes flat authorization levels. At the legislative hearing we held on this bill back in June, more than one witness expressed concern about NWIRP being underfunded.

However, this Committee has an important role to play in making sure agencies and communities have the resources and tools to minimize the loss of life and property by windstorms or to face the challenge of rebuilding their homes, businesses, and communities after a major windstorm. And reauthorizing NWIRP helps us do that.

I want to thank my fellow Texans—Chairman Smith and Mr. Neugebauer—for working across the aisle on this bill. This process reminds me of how this Committee used to work on a regular basis. It is good to see Members coming together, working out their differences, compromising, and ending up with a bill with bipartisan support. I hope we can continue in this vein as we take up other, significant legislation in the coming months, including reauthorizing the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program.

Finally, I want to thank Majority and Minority Committee staff, and personal office staff who have worked on this agreement. Mr. Chairman, I support the manager's amendment and the underlying bill as amended and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.