

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Paul Broun, M.D. (R-GA), Chairman

Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight

Continuing Oversight of the Nation's Weather Satellite Programs: An Update on JPSS and GOES-R

June 27, 2012

I want to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses and thank them for appearing today.

This is the ninth hearing this Committee has held on either the National Polar-orbiting Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS) program or its successor the JPSS program since 2003. That does not even include hearings related to Geostationary Observational Environmental Satellite (GOES) and weather satellites in general. This level of oversight, continued under both Republican and Democratic Administrations and Congresses, is indicative of how important weather satellites are to our society. Without both polar and geostationary satellites, our weather forecasting ability would be severely compromised.

Because of the importance of these programs, it is frustrating to watch them struggle. The original polar satellite program, NPOESS, was supposed to cost \$6.5 billion. That was supposed to get the taxpayers six satellites, operating in three separate orbits, carrying 13 instruments, which would launch around 2010. Instead, we now have a program that will only purchase three satellites; that will operate in only one orbit; and cost twice as much. To make matters worse, one of those satellites is a research satellite that was never intended to serve operationally; NOAA is now dependent on European partners for data from the midmorning orbit; and it's anyone's guess what data the Department of Defense (DOD) will supply from the early morning orbit.

Even more frustrating is the fact that this program still does not have a baseline for cost and schedule. I understand that NOAA is working towards developing this, but as they point out, the ground segment has already passed its critical design review, all of its contracts are signed, JPSS-1's instruments are 60 to 95 percent complete, and the spacecraft will essentially be a clone of the NPP bus – all indicators of a mature program. To quote the GAO report, not having a baseline “makes it more difficult for program officials to make informed decisions and for program overseers to understand if the program is on track to successfully deliver expected functionality on cost and schedule.”

I understand that NOAA has committed to developing the program under a life cycle cost cap of \$12.9 billion, but with an impending gap in coverage that limits schedule flexibility, the only option that NOAA may have to manage program risk is to diminish capability. I am also concerned that this \$12.9 billion cap is \$1.7 billion lower than the independent cost estimate conducted last year. I look forward to monitoring how NOAA decides to cover that shortfall, and any future challenges. Just since our hearing last fall the program has grown by \$1 billion as a result of extending the program by 4 years, the addition of free flyers, contract transitions, and a work slow-down because of the 2011 budget. Also, the schedule has slipped approximately three months.

One of the most concerning findings from the GAO report on JPSS pertains not to cost increases or schedule gaps in NOAA's afternoon orbit, but to the health of the entire polar-orbiting constellation. GAO points out that because of uncertainties in DOD's early morning orbit, as well as the Europeans' midmorning orbit, there is a risk of a data gap in each orbit, not just NOAA's. After the 2010 decision to split up the program, NOAA was only given responsibility for the afternoon orbit, but it is clear that the parties need to coordinate to identify synergies and mitigate risks to the entire constellation.

GOES-R on the other hand seems to be making progress toward delivering its spacecraft and ground system within cost and schedule. This wasn't always the case, as the program was significantly de-scoped in 2007 in order to prevent cost growth and schedule slips. Still, there are some findings in the GAO report that require monitoring, such as the rate at which the program is burning through reserves, and the fidelity of its schedules. Most concerning, however, is the GAO finding that there is only a 48 percent chance that the program will meet its 2015 launch date, and that there is a 37 percent chance that there will be a gap in the availability of two operational GOES-series satellites.

A gap in one program is bad enough. A gap in both programs would be catastrophic.

I would be remiss if I did not at least mention the Senate Appropriations proposal to transfer the weather satellite programs from NOAA to NASA. I hope NOAA and NASA can provide their thoughts on this proposal, specifically how it would impact the current programs, as well as the rest of their agencies.

I know these oversight hearings can sometimes be tough, but considering NOAA's current position, the House may be one of the agency's few friends. The Administration has proposed moving NOAA into the Department of Interior, and the Senate has proposed gutting the satellite program from NOAA, effectively removing \$2 billion of NOAA's \$5 billion budget. The Committee has a positive working relationship with the satellite sector of NOAA, which is typically forthcoming with information. Unfortunately this was not the case with questions the Committee posed to NOAA last fall after the last hearing. Although we sent questions on October 17, we did not receive a response until June 7 – eight months later. I certainly hope NOAA will be more responsive to the questions we will have after this hearing.

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