COMMITTEE ON
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Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Environment Subcommittee Chairman Jim Bridenstine (R-Okla.)
Exploring Commercial Opportunities to Maximize Earth Science Investments

Chairman Bridenstine: Good morning. I thank the gentleman from Texas, Dr. Babin, for holding this hearing. Today we are discussing an issue that has been the subject of a number of hearings before the Environment Subcommittee this year: utilizing commercial solutions to satisfy government missions.

My subcommittee has examined how the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA, could apply commercial space-based data to improve weather forecasting. In similar fashion, today we will explore commercial opportunities to provide NASA with critical earth science data.

As one of NASA's Science Mission Directorates, contributions from Earth Sciences have enhanced our understanding of the Earth. As one example, NASA Earth Science missions have improved our weather forecasts. I represent the State of Oklahoma – I know all too well the dangers posed by severe weather events, and the need to improve our capabilities of predicting storms to protect lives and property.

At NOAA, the opportunity exists for the Agency to partner with the growing commercial weather industry. Such partnerships could greatly reduce the cost of operating large monolithic satellite systems, resulting in lower government spending, greater resiliency, and increased quality of forecasts.

The Environment Subcommittee has heard from a number of private sector companies that have or will soon have the capabilities to provide data to NOAA, and want to partner with the Agency. In an encouraging sign, NOAA has begun to take notice of the emerging industry and has started taking the first steps to incorporating private space-based technologies.

In September of this year, NOAA released a draft commercial space policy, designed to assist the acquisition of future commercial technologies. I look forward to NOAA releasing a final version that incorporates stakeholder concerns and feedback with the draft version. In encourage NOAA to make releasing the final Commercial Space Policy a top priority, along with releasing the necessary next steps such as NESDIS' accompanying procurement process guide. These documents are essential to forming the basis for how the private sector will interact with NOAA going forward.

I am pleased to see this committee taking the first steps to look at how NASA can follow a similar trajectory. It is my firm belief the government ought not do what the private sector can. Our ability to utilize commercial options will minimize government spending and aid mission directives. I am optimistic that a market will materialize for many different space-based technologies, as we have seen time and time again with the Department of Defense's requirements and are beginning to see with NOAA's needs. NASA ought to recognize this pattern and take a good hard look at utilizing these opportunities.

To do this, NASA should take a proactive step to re-establish its commercial earth observation data buy program that has laid dormant for years, establish clear policy supporting and directing the acquisition of commercial data, establish the appropriate protocols to support commercial options, and begin meaningful dialogue with the private sector to assess the usefulness of public-private partnerships to meet its Earth observation data requirements.

With NOAA, we've seen commercial space-based data companies waiting for the Agency to have a finalized framework in place so they can enter into agreements, raise capital, and launch satellites. However, in the case of NASA, there isn't a commercial earth observation data policy in place yet.

I hope this hearing can be used to identify and determine the necessary first steps in that process.
I thank the witnesses for being here today, and look forward to your testimonies. Thank you and I yield back.

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