



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

For Immediate Release
December 10, 2015

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Statement from Environment Subcommittee Chairman Jim Bridenstine (R-Okla.)

An Overview of the Nation's Weather Satellite Programs and Policies

Chairman Bridenstine: Good morning and welcome to today's joint Environment and Oversight Subcommittee hearing. I want to thank our witnesses for appearing today.

This Committee has held numerous hearings over the years on NOAA's satellite programs, and today marks the second hearing on this subject so far this Congress. Much has happened since our witnesses last appeared before this Committee, so now is an appropriate time for an update.

First, we received news this fall that the launch of NOAA's GOES-R Satellite, a geosynchronous satellite that will provide crucial weather data over the continental United States, would be delayed from March 2016 to October 2016. While no delay is good news, those who have been following the history of NOAA's satellite programs of record are likely not surprised. GOES, like JPSS, has been delayed numerous times since its inception, adding to the very real possibility of a gap in the critical data that feeds our numerical weather models.

I am also interested in learning more about NOAA's recent update to the life cycle estimates of the current GOES program. To date, this Committee has received minimal supporting documentation from NOAA justifying these changes. I believe a more thorough explanation is necessary because the updated estimate would make it appear on paper that a gap is not a distinct possibility. There is a clear dissonance between NOAA's view and the belief that many hold that the risk of a data gap is high, and I would like to know why.

My concerns about a gap in data were highlighted when we recently learned that a retired NOAA satellite broke up on orbit. While this satellite was not currently in use, it raises questions: how viable are NOAA's satellites as they age? What happens when satellites are extended well beyond their designed life? What components utilized on the satellite that broke up are being used on currently operating NOAA satellites? And what design reviews of satellites being built today are being undertaken?

Due to the critical role satellite observations play in forecasts, it is critical NOAA be vigilant in mitigating, preventing, and avoiding space debris. Losing an operational satellite due to space debris will severely degrade forecasts and put millions of Americans at risk. We need to be certain that our costly satellite systems remain robust and safe.

Finally, I am eager to discuss NOAA's Commercial Space Policy. This Committee has gone to great lengths to better understand the policy, and had some initial concerns regarding the draft document. For instance, we heard from many in industry that the policy did not include enough detail about how a commercial company will actually partner with the Agency. I know many comments on the policy were submitted, and I look forward to NOAA taking these comments into account and publishing the final

policy as soon as possible. I also look forward to other documents that the Agency has stated are the next step toward incorporating commercial data, including the NESDIS process guide for how commercial companies will begin the process of working with NOAA.

I look forward to discussing these issues and more today. This Committee will remain vigilant in its oversight responsibilities to ensure that Americans have the best possible weather forecasts to save lives and property.

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