



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

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Statement of Environment Subcommittee Chairman Jim Bridenstine (R-Okla.)
An Overview of the Budget Request for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration for Fiscal Year 2017

Chairman Bridenstine: I want to thank our witness, Dr. Sullivan, for appearing today before us to talk about the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's FY 2017 Budget Request.

As a representative from Oklahoma, a state hit regularly with severe weather, it is my responsibility to my constituents to promote policies that improve our forecasting abilities in order to save lives and property. My constituents, and the American people, deserve nothing less.

So I want to say that I am encouraged to see NOAA begin to utilize the growing opportunities that can bring a paradigm shift to the weather prediction landscape. This year's budget has a number of initiatives that I support.

First, the budget requests an increase to the Office of Space Commerce. This office will be the place where private sector companies interact with NOAA through requests for information, proposals, data buys, and other partnerships. A properly staffed and funded office where the private sector can engage with NOAA is a vital component in a changing forecasting paradigm.

Second, I was pleased to see NOAA request funding to continue the Commercial Weather Data Pilot program authorized by H.R. 1561, the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Act. This pilot program is an important signal to the private sector that NOAA is interested in new and innovative sources of data. Yesterday, we finally received the statutorily required report from NOAA detailing how the pilot program will be implemented, and I look forward to discussing that more during my questions.

Third, I am encouraged to see NOAA incorporate a line item for the purchase of radio occultation data as a potential alternative to another constellation of COSMIC satellites. This Committee has conducted several years of oversight on various weather data sources and technologies, and we have found that GPS-RO is a very promising technology that has the potential to revolutionize our forecasts.

However, I have some concerns. Before any private sector providers can engage with NOAA, it must lay out how these processes will work. NOAA released its Commercial Space Policy in January; a document laying out in very broad strokes how NOAA will utilize data acquisitions and other products from commercial companies. This policy was supposed to be quickly followed by a more specific process guide from NESDIS. We have yet to see that document.

Finally, the budget request language for radio occultation data acquisition seems to call for the purchase of commercial data only if NOAA fails to acquire data internally first – meaning, through the owning and operating of a government satellite constellation. In budget language and staff meetings, it does not appear that NOAA actually has any intention to truly consider alternative sources.

I fundamentally disagree with this strategy. Private providers have already launched some GPS-RO satellites, and others have plans to launch this year and next. NOAA should consider this option on an equal playing field, not only after exhausting all other options.

Private sector companies could improve our forecasting capabilities while also reducing the risk of a gap in our satellite data, an issue that has loomed over the Agency's head for years.

In the absence of action from NOAA, the House of Representatives continues to work with our Senate counterparts to bring H.R. 1561 to the finish line. This is bipartisan legislation which will statutorily compel NOAA to consider commercial data to augment our currently fragile satellite systems in orbit. This bill will also increase NOAA's ability to conduct cutting edge weather research needed to move to a day where there are zero deaths from tornados in this country.

I look forward to discussing these issues and more today. I yield back and recognize the Gentlewoman from Oregon, the ranking member, Ms. Bonamici.

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