



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

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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

Examining the Nation's Current and Next Generation Weather Satellite Programs

Chairman Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to our witnesses for being here today.

The Science Committee has held many hearings on NOAA's troubled weather satellite programs over the years. These problems largely stem from the Federal Government's ill-fated consolidation of civilian and military weather and climate systems, which created slow, costly, and inefficient inter-agency programs to handle our weather prediction.

In 2010, when it became apparent that the National Polar-orbiting Environmental Satellite System was a failure, the Administration cancelled it and left the agencies, namely NOAA and DOD, to create their own individual polar programs. In NOAA's case, they initiated the J-P-S-S satellite, which unfortunately has continually encountered delays, cost overruns and mismanagement. Over the last several years, NOAA's spending for satellite operations has ballooned to account for roughly 40% of its total budget, over \$2 billion. This prevents NOAA from adequately pursuing other important areas of science, service, and stewardship.

NOAA now proposes to move forward with the next series of weather satellites using the same technology, the Polar Follow-On. So, I am concerned that the same problems that have occurred over the last ten years will continue. This Committee needs assurance that NOAA will get its government satellite spending under control and be able to meet future forecasting needs. Congress should not continue to fund an over-budget program that has not performed up to standards. So what is NOAA doing differently with its next series of satellites that justifies such high continued funding? I fear the answer is nothing.

I am also not convinced that NOAA is adequately mitigating the very real possibility of a gap in our weather data. In the face of real threats, NOAA should be doing all it can to prevent data gaps, yet they continue to drag their feet and not consider all options. The growing private sector weather enterprise could mitigate NOAA's shortcomings through new technologies and sources of data, but NOAA shows that it will only take action if forced to do so. If NOAA is afraid of innovation, maybe they shouldn't be in the business of deciding what technologies are needed for improved forecasting.

For instance, commercial satellites equipped with the latest technology could help prevent data gaps, provide new kinds of advanced data, improve current and future model forecasts, and do so on a much faster timeline at lower cost than large and slow government systems. So why isn't NOAA considering these?

NOAA should absolutely consider the help that the private sector can provide. In this case, commercial innovation beats the status-quo of slow, costly government systems. Faster, better, and cheaper solutions take vision, competence, and courage. NOAA needs more of these qualities.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how we can get our nation's future weather data needs on track and on time to provide our citizens with the critical weather forecasts they need and deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

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