

Opening Statement
Ranking Member Miller

Joint Subcommittee Hearing: From NPOESS to JPSS: An Update on the Nation's Restructured Polar Weather Satellite Program

Friday, September 23, 2011

Good morning and thank you to my colleagues for holding this hearing and the witnesses we have before us this morning. The Science Committee, under the leadership of former Chairman Boehlert and Chairman Gordon, has devoted years of oversight to this satellite program. And under my tenure as Chairman of the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee, despite our relentless pressure to get this program under control, we meet again today to learn that the NPOESS, now known as the JPSS program, is still expecting cost growth and facing schedule slips that ultimately leaves this country with gaps in the data that provide all of us with our weather and climate forecasting needs.

The Committee's first hearing on this subject was in 2003, which was my first year in Congress. At that time, the first NPOESS satellite was projected for launch in 2009. Fast forward to 2011 and now the first POES satellite is slated to launch later this year. And this NPOESS Preparatory Project (NPP) was not originally planned as an operational satellite but now because of all the turmoil this program has gone through under both Republican and Democratic Administrations, we are left with few choices. We must do any and everything we possibly can to ensure that American taxpayers, American travelers, American business sectors, and just everyday Americans are supplied the short – and long – term weather forecasts that are critical to saving lives and properties. This year alone, this country has witnessed in every region and on every coastline some of the most extreme, record-breaking weather events.

The idea of not fully funding this satellite program and or hoping to make up for lost time or restoring the funding later, obviously will not work and is totally unacceptable. The delays, lack of a baseline, and cost overruns we will hear about today are important; but the most important fact is what role each of us needs to play in mitigating the chances of a weather data gap. Unfortunately due to the damage already done to this program, and there is enough blame to go around, mitigating a data gap may be out of the hands of human control. Therefore, today we must decide to ensure that we do not exacerbate the gap in coverage that this program is already facing.

Whether a baseline was established or not, what JPSS experienced this year in funding definitely will not help us get to the finish line. A mere 36 percent in the requested funding for this program is not savings; but a loss in progress and a surefire way to ensure that the 18-20 month data gap we are facing now actually happens.

Satellite programs are unlike any other programs we fund in our government. We do not have the luxury of slothfulness or negligence. With every passing month, and every dollar lost we get closer to the probability of a data interruption in weather data as well as the certain interruption in climate data. Right now NOAA is primarily pinning its hopes to avoiding a data gap on a successful launch of the NPP satellite next month- which again was never intended as an operational satellite – and then on the hopes and prayers that this satellite goes beyond its life expectancy. This is no way to run a program or to ensure Americans that are already living lives of uncertainty in so many other areas, that we are here to at least do the jobs they entrusted us all to do. The things we can change and mitigate, we should, and this is

one of them. We must do all that is necessary to ensure we protect the lives and properties of every American.

Without JPSS being funded and delivered in a timely manner will not only lead to less accurate and timely weather predictions, but leave our country to rely on primitive weather forecasting capabilities. I think we are all very well aware that over 70 percent of airplane flight delays are caused by weather. If we as the American people who travel on these flights, especially Congressional Members, and the FAA who control the air traffic do not have the information we need, this could cause serious safety issues.

We are putting our lives, property, and critical infrastructure in danger. Without accurate and timely information, we would no longer see the 3-4 day advance warnings of extreme events. This will make it extremely difficult to conduct safe and strategic evacuations of American people. So I hope we will spend our time today trying to deal with the needs of this program as it is, all agree where we need to go and determine to make sure we all work together to ensure we get there.