

**“From NPOESS to JPSS:
An Update on the Nation’s Restructured
Polar Weather Satellite Program “**
Statement by the Honorable Donna F. Edwards (D-MD)
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Investigations & Oversight
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Between 2004 and 2008, the polar orbiting satellite acquisition program was riddled with cost overruns, schedule delays, mismanagement, inattention and plain bad luck. That program, the National Polar Orbiting Environmental Satellite System or NPOESS, was ultimately restructured by the Obama Administration in February 2010.

At that time, NOAA and NASA were given a green light to produce weather satellites to meet civilian weather forecasting needs, and the Department of Defense, which had been a roadblock to decision-making in the troubled NPOESS program, was tasked to build their own polar orbiters.

Since February 2010, NOAA and NASA have had to set up a new program structure and renegotiate the instrument and satellite bus contracts with a half-dozen companies. Additionally, since October of 2010, the agencies have been crippled by a brutal budget environment.

Seven continuing resolutions in the first six months of Fiscal Year 2011, which created uncertainty for the program and resulted in continuous replanning of the project, were replaced by a final funding level that represented just 36% of what the Administration had sought for this program. Instead of slightly more than \$1 billion requested by the Administration to ramp up contracts and get the next generation of polar satellites back on track, NOAA received just \$382 million—a figure that all observers knew was insufficient to move the program forward at the pace it needs to move.

Instead of being able to get contractors working, NOAA and NASA ended up having to engage in an exercise in triage—what could they jettison in their work plan to keep the most essential things moving? What were the top priorities?

For the first time in a long time on the polar satellite acquisition, I think that both NOAA and NASA deserve to be congratulated for the way they managed that exercise and their actual accomplishments. To lay them out:

- The agencies oversaw the successful transfer of all contracts;
- The agencies prioritized getting the NPP satellite ready for launch, and it remains on schedule for an October 25 launch date—a satellite needed to maintain data continuity until 2016;
- The agencies pushed for necessary upgrades to the ground system so that the NPP satellite could communicate with the ground and NOAA could receive data transmissions; and
- Finally, the agencies completed hiring all the key positions for their management teams and appear to have attracted top-class talent.

These are terrific accomplishments carried off with a budget insufficient for the tasks. But the tradeoff for these accomplishments, given insufficient money, has been cuts to spending for the JPSS-1 and JPSS-2 satellites and an unavoidable slip in projected completion. This funding shortfall has created a situation in which it appears inevitable that we will suffer a data gap that will degrade the quality of our weather forecasts.

I want to thank GAO for their testimony today and their ongoing oversight of this project. They have been an important partner for this Committee in trying to straighten out NPOESS. However, the notion that the biggest problem with JPSS is the lack of a baseline budget seems a little short-sighted.

Perhaps NOAA and NASA could have created a reliable baseline between February of 2010 and September 2010, but the appropriations environment was already uncertain and contracts were being renegotiated so key cost data were unavailable. Between October 2010 and April 2011, the budget situation was so fluid and chaotic that forging a baseline would have been an empty exercise. Since April, even as the staff of NOAA and NASA sought to do the impossible with insufficient support, my understanding is that they have worked up a baseline and that it is out for an independent cost estimate.

The reality is that if a baseline had been established at any time before the massive funding shortfall that came in April 2011, the agency would probably have to declare a projected overrun and enter into a re-baselining exercise as required in law. So the fact that they are now working up a baseline appears prudent and reasonable, and I would note that they may have to tweak that baseline yet based on what the Appropriations committees do in funding for FY2012.

I will say that if we meet next year and no baseline is in place, I will then join GAO in pointing to that as an area of real risk. But I trust that the agencies want a baseline at this point as much as GAO wishes they had one, and so we won't need to have that conversation.

It is essential that the polar-orbiting satellites are on-orbit transmitting high quality data. The National Weather Service uses that data to provide the public with reliable weather forecasts. Lives depend on this information. Businesses make decisions every year worth billions of dollars based on this information. In terms of direct impact on the economy and the safety of lives and property, dollar-for-dollar, this is probably the single most important acquisition in this Committee's jurisdiction.

I believe we need to be as active in supporting it as we have been in pushing the program to institute reforms. I am ready to work with any of my colleagues on this Committee to convince our friends on Appropriations that cuts in this program are unacceptable.

I thank the Chairman for this hearing and yield back.