

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Advancing Commercial Weather Data: Collaborative Efforts to Improve Forecasts
Environment Subcommittee Hearing

May 20, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to extend a warm welcome and thank you to our witnesses for being here today to discuss the potential for increased use of commercial weather data by NOAA.

As many of you know, this Committee has long been invested in the successful development and maintenance of NOAA's observing capabilities. This data, especially, the satellite data, is critical to NOAA's mission to protect lives and property through accurate and timely weather forecasts and warnings.

While NOAA seems to have its satellite programs back on track, a history of mismanagement and cost overruns have caused many to question the future of the nation's observing capabilities and the possibility of increasing our reliance on the private sector to meet NOAA's space-based data needs.

This is an appropriate discussion to have and I am pleased that we will be examining that topic more closely today. That being said, I have a number of questions and concerns about how such an arrangement might work.

In particular, NOAA currently treats its data as a public good, sharing it freely with academia, the private sector, and our international partners. Any restrictions on the use and long-term availability of this critical data could have a number of unintended consequences such as stifling innovation not only in the development of our weather and climate models, but in the advancement of research and technology more broadly. This Committee has heard over and over again how data collected for one purpose has resulted in an unforeseen breakthrough in another area. Advancing the use of commercial weather data cannot come at the expense of advancing research.

Additionally, I remain concerned about how the increased reliance on commercial entities may impact our international obligations and partnerships. Observing the Earth and its changes is a truly global enterprise and we all benefit from deep and long-lasting international engagement and data sharing. Anything with the potential to harm such arrangements must be dealt with from the beginning.

And finally, Mr. Chairman, I'd like to reiterate a comment expressed by my colleague, Ms. Bonamici, about the importance of hearing directly from NOAA regarding their plans to

strengthen public-private partnerships in this area and the challenges associated with expanding those efforts. I hope will have the opportunity to hear from NOAA in at a future hearing.

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.