

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR)
of the Subcommittee on Environment

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Environment
“Examining the Nation’s Current and Next Generation Weather Satellite Programs”
July 7, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

The data collected by NOAA’s weather satellites are the backbone of NOAA’s weather prediction capabilities and support weather forecasting activities around the globe.

NOAA, in coordination with its interagency and international partners, is working diligently to move the national weather satellite system into a robust state so we will have certainty and continuity of accurate and reliable forecasts and severe storm warnings. In addition to providing uninterrupted weather observations in the near term, NOAA is actively assessing what new capabilities will be required, beyond the 2020s, to protect American lives and property during extreme weather events. I am looking forward to hearing about both of these efforts.

As we have discussed in the past, however, both the geostationary and polar weather satellite programs, GOES and J-P-S-S, have experienced schedule delays, significant cost growth, technical performance concerns, and management challenges. Although any and all remaining challenges must be addressed, I am pleased to note that NOAA has made significant progress, and we expect to soon be celebrating the successful launches of the GOES-R and JPSS-1 satellites.

It is critical that these programs remain on schedule to minimize the potential risk to the collection of observations and data that are needed for NOAA’s weather forecasting activities. Even the best laid plans can be met with unanticipated events—a launch failure or potential satellite malfunction, for example. I will be listening for an update on the status of NOAA’s contingency plans in the event that we do face a gap in data continuity and I look forward to hearing about NOAA’s efforts to put the weather satellite programs on a path to the “robust” state that the 2013 Independent Review Team recommended.

In addition, the strength of our civil weather satellite system relies heavily on the interagency and international partnerships that NOAA has had in place over decades. This morning’s hearing provides the opportunity for us to learn more about NOAA’s work with the Department of Defense and the communication among partners on future weather satellite planning efforts.

As we look ahead, NOAA’s partnerships are expected to extend to commercial entities. NOAA is taking concrete steps toward implementing its Commercial Weather Data Pilot program in response to direction in the FY 2016 Omnibus Appropriations Act. In fact, I understand that Dr. Volz will be attending an Industry Day workshop immediately following our hearing, where he will receive feedback from companies interested in participating in the pilot program. I’m

encouraged that NOAA has implemented the Commercial Weather Data Pilot program promptly and has provided an open dialogue throughout the process.

Finally, the planned launches of both the GOES-R and JPSS-1 satellites should not mark the conclusion of NOAA's programmatic efforts, but rather should be the figurative launching pad of the planning and development of our next generation of weather satellites. I look forward to hearing about both NOAA's Polar Follow-On Program and its long-term architecture plans.

I yield back the balance of my time.