

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 1, 2023

Honorable Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

As the Chairman of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and the Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, we are writing to request that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conduct a review of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) next-generation geostationary satellite program, Geostationary Extended Observations (GeoXO).

The GeoXO program, which began in December 2022, is NOAA's largest procurement ever with a projected lifecycle cost of \$19.6 billion. The development period will span a decade, with initial launch planned for 2032 and a final launch planned for 2035. Data from GeoXO will contribute to weather forecast models and drive short-term weather forecasts and severe weather warnings. Additionally, NOAA plans for GeoXO to detect and monitor environmental hazards like wildfires, smoke, dust, volcanic ash, drought, and flooding, which will provide advanced warning to decision-makers.

GeoXO is the successor to NOAA's current geostationary satellite program, Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite - R Series (GOES-R). GOES-R was a \$10.9 billion acquisition that is critical to monitoring severe storm activity across the United States and plays a key role in providing weather and climate data for military and civilian forecasting. In recent years, GAO has reported on issues that NOAA has had developing and operating GOES-R, including challenges in managing cost, schedule, and risks. Although NOAA made progress towards overcoming these challenges, the GOES-R program experienced delays in meeting major program milestones (including launch delays), expansions in cost, and changes in scope, all of which impacted the functionality of the program and introduced the potential to leave gaps in critical weather surveillance.<sup>1</sup> The delays and budget overruns in the GOES-R program make it all the more important to ensure that GeoXO is well-managed, as any problems will be magnified by the greater complexity and cost of GeoXO.

NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad recently testified before Congress that he has undertaken the process of building a "rigorous acquisition strategy and structure."<sup>2</sup> Specifically, he stated that this strategy and structure include a requirements-based approach, a specific definition of risk

---

<sup>1</sup> GAO, *Environmental Satellites: Launch Delayed; NOAA Faces Key Decisions on Timing of Future Satellites*, GAO-16-143T (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 10, 2015), <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-16-143t>.

<sup>2</sup> Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, *An Overview of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Budget Proposal for Fiscal Year 2024*, May 11, 2023.

register elements and mitigation, and milestone gates for each step in the acquisition process. He also expressed his confidence that NOAA could prevent cost and schedule overruns. While these appear to be positive steps, it is unclear if this new process will be successful.

Given the cost, complexity, and scope of the GeoXO program; its similarities to the GOES-R initiative; and uncertainty around the newly implemented acquisition processes at NOAA, our committees have concerns about—and are asking GAO to review—the GeoXO program’s ability to meet its cost, schedule, and performance requirements. Specifically, we request that GAO:

- 1) Assess the extent to which NOAA has followed best practices and statutory guidance to establish cost estimates for the GeoXO program;
- 2) Evaluate the design and development of the GeoXO program, including an analysis of the processes NOAA undertook to establish technical requirements and specifications;
- 3) Assess the extent to which NOAA has implemented strategies to effectively manage program schedules and ensure that milestones are met; and
- 4) Evaluate the extent to which NOAA has identified and incorporated lessons learned from previous weather developments (e.g., GOES-R) into the development, roles, and responsibilities of GeoXO.

Please contact Mr. Daniel Dziadon at the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and Dr. Alexis Rudd at the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation to discuss the details and timing of this GAO review.

Sincerely,



Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
House Committee on Science,  
Space, and Technology



Ted Cruz  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Commerce  
Science, and Transportation