

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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**Statement of Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Paul Broun (R-Ga.)
Hearing on Dysfunction in Management of Weather and Climate Satellites**

Chairman Broun: I want to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses and thank them for appearing today.

The Committee on Science, Space, and Technology has held about a dozen hearings on weather satellites, under both Republican and Democratic leadership, since 2003. Continued oversight is important because these programs are important. Data from these satellites not only help one decide whether or not to leave the house with an umbrella, they allow meteorologists to more accurately predict extreme weather, military planners to more intelligently deploy troops around the world, and emergency managers to better respond to wildfires and other natural disasters.

Unfortunately, the programs have been plagued with problems. The Department of Commerce Office of Inspector General, the U.S. Government Accountability Office and other independent reviewers have repeatedly assessed that the programs are at risk of exceeding cost and missing deadlines due to a myriad of issues. Citing ongoing concerns about potential data gaps for NOAA's polar-orbiting and geostationary satellite programs, including a potential polar-orbiting gap of 17 to 53 months, GAO added NOAA's satellite programs to its High Risk List in a report issued earlier this year.

On that note, I want to take a moment to thank the GAO staff for their diligent work on this issue over the years. You have been a valuable resource to this Committee's oversight efforts, and I want our witness Mr. Powner to know that we appreciate your work and your presence here today.

As I have said before, it is frustrating to watch these important programs struggle. But it is even more frustrating to be told by NOAA and NASA that "all is well" when we all know that is not the case. An IG report, GAO reports, and a 2012 independent report sponsored by NOAA all say otherwise, with the independent report going so far as to use the word "dysfunctional" in its analysis of the weather satellite programs. Another independent NOAA-commissioned report released this year described the possibility of the United States' reliance on China for satellite data as a "silver bullet." I have grave concerns about incorporating data into U.S. systems from a country well-known for its persistent and malicious cyber attacks against our nation.

The latest lifecycle cost estimate for JPSS is \$11.3 billion, but it took some crafty accounting to arrive at that number. Along the way, the program went from six satellites, operating in three separate orbits and carrying 11 unique sensors under NPOESS, the precursor to JPSS, to now two satellites, operating in one orbit, carrying only five sensors. Even with those downgrades, the first JPSS satellite isn't scheduled to launch until March 2017.

The GOES-R program is further along than JPSS, but it too is facing a potential data coverage gap. It is my understanding that NOAA expects to retire one of its operational satellites, GOES-13, and move the back-up, GOES-14, into operation in April 2015. That means for at least six months, there will be no backup satellite, assuming GOES-R is launched in October 2015. Recently, however, program officials acknowledged that the launch date will likely slip by one quarter, which could result in a delay of as much as six months. And the cause for the delay? A \$54 million sequester cut, according to NOAA staff.

If money is so tight and our weather satellite programs so vulnerable, then perhaps the Administration needs to evaluate its priorities and determine which is more important – near-term weather monitoring, which can save lives and property today, or beefing up NASA’s climate portfolio in an effort to guess what the weather might be decades from now.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses’ testimonies and receiving some candid answers to our questions. Let me also make this general observation to you all: it is a lot easier for Congress to work collaboratively with the Administration on solving our satellite problems if there is transparency about potential concerns. As such, I will ask you to please answer our questions later in a concise, straightforward, and accurate manner. It will defeat the purpose of this hearing if our questions are sidestepped through the use of bureaucratic doublespeak, as that will only try our patience and waste our limited time.

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