

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Andy Harris (R-MD), Chairman

Subcommittee on Energy and Environment

From NPOESS to JPSS: An Update on the Nation's Restructure Polar Weather Satellite Program

September 23, 2011

Good morning. I want to thank our witnesses for being here today to testify on the Joint Polar Satellite System, or JPSS. I appreciate you taking time from your busy schedules to appear before us this morning.

The most critical issue facing our nation today is out-of-control spending by the Federal government. Knowing that we cannot spend more than we have should seem like pretty simple math, but it has taken dire economic conditions for some folks to wake up and notice. In these times, it is even more important that the money we do spend is spent wisely and efficiently.

The JPSS program is the ultimate example of a runaway government program that has over promised, is over budget, and has underperformed. While the White House's decision to split apart the defense and civilian satellite programs in February 2010 may have been the correct one, the lack of understanding about the complexity of transition and insufficient planning have contributed to even further delays and a more costly program.

There is no doubt that weather satellites play a vital role in keeping the country informed and safe. Severe weather jeopardizes human health, costs billions of dollars every year, and has a significant impact on our economic vitality. The ability to do timely and accurate weather forecasting is not at question here, and should not be compromised. However, given the number of problems this program has experienced, the time has come to talk about what is the best way for NOAA to obtain the necessary data to do these forecasts. And by best way, I mean the most efficient and cost effective way.

I am pleased we are having this hearing today, and I commend the Chairman of the Investigations and Oversight Subcommittee on his continued work ensuring that Federal science and technology programs are appropriate, cost-effective, and are managed properly. As Chairman of the Energy and Environment Subcommittee, I want to understand what policies got us in this mess to begin with, and how do we avoid the same problems in the future. The JPSS program will only give us two satellites for a cost of more than double its initial estimates. However, without a baseline for this program, it is impossible to say what the ultimate costs will be.

The witnesses from this Administration will likely blame “budget uncertainty” from this Congress for the planning failures of JPSS, but providing a basic and reasonable baseline for a project is something that every business in the country has to do.

The Executive Order to combine the defense and civilian satellite programs was issued in 1994. The first satellite – a research turned operational satellite – is set to launch later this year. It has taken these government agencies seventeen years to go from the initial order to the launching of a satellite. Given this record, NOAA needs to start thinking now what it will do to obtain the necessary data when the JPSS satellites are no longer functional seventeen years from now – assuming they last that long.

We no longer have the luxury to continuously appropriate funding for programs like this. Careful planning, realistic expectations, and outside-the-box type of thinking will be required in order to ensure continued and advancing weather forecasting capabilities in the future.

Thank you again for your time.