

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Andy Harris (R-MD), Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy & Environment

*Continuing Oversight of the Nation's Weather Satellite Programs: An Update on JPSS and
GOES-R*

June 27, 2012

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the witnesses for joining us to discuss NOAA's environmental satellite issues.

This is the second hearing we have had on NOAA satellites in this Congress alone, and I understand this Committee has had many more over past several Congresses. With this much oversight, we would typically hope to see some improvement. And in some areas we have. However, with every step forward, it seems we are taking two steps back.

The launch of the NPP satellite last October was certainly an achievement, and NOAA and NASA are to be applauded for the successful launch. But the satellite was 5 years late, and some of the instruments are not working as well as they should be.

The contracts for the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) have finally been transferred from its predecessor program and NASA and NOAA are making progress. But the threat of a data gap remains, and the cost of the program has increased by \$1 billion dollars, squeezing funds available for important ground- and air-based weather systems.

The Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite, or GOES, program, is moving along, but NOAA is burning through its funding reserves quicker than anticipated and risk has still not been reduced.

Today we will be told that there is a possibility of a GOES gap, right around the same time as the possibility of a JPSS gap. As we learned in an Energy and Environment Subcommittee hearing several months ago, the majority of the data used in weather prediction models by the National Weather Service comes from satellite data. The prospect of a JPSS coverage gap is troubling enough in itself, but the possibility of a concurrent gap in GOES coverage presents a truly scary scenario that significantly threatens U.S. lives and property.

Given these difficulties, perhaps it is time for us to seek a new paradigm when procuring data for weather forecasting. The current procurement process is simply not working, and time is running out, but to date there appears little interest in pursuing alternative solutions. While there are no easy answers to this dilemma, and the choices we make will require significant effort and evaluation, we must accept the status quo cannot continue.

Again, I thank the witnesses for being here with us today and I look forward to an informative discussion.