

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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May 12, 2006

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Mr. President,

We write today to ask that you act expeditiously to put a new management team in place at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The largest acquisition in the history of that agency is for the National Polar Orbiting Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS). As recently as March of 2005, managers at NOAA were reassuring our staff that the project was under control in terms of cost and schedule. At that time, the baseline budget for the program was \$6.8 billion. Today, the program is estimated to cost \$13.8 billion to complete. With NOAA having an entire annual budget of just \$4 billion dollars, this 100% cost overrun of \$7 billion is simply unacceptable.

Vice Admiral Lautenbacher is currently serving as the Administrator for NOAA. At no time in the last two years has the Administrator ever been candid with these Members or the Committee on Science regarding the true problems with this project. We were never sure whether he was purposely obfuscating or was legitimately ignorant of the problems. The release of a recent Inspector General's report suggests that he and other top managers at NOAA simply did not pay attention to information pulsing through the NPOESS system that the cost and schedule were perilously at risk. Curiously, the Admiral both claims to want to embrace the findings and recommendations of the IG report and yet repudiates their premise. He claims that, contrary to the IG's findings, he was intimately involved in the management of this program. This leaves us with the difficult situation of trying to determine if he was negligent, as the IG suggests, or incompetent. Either would be sufficient reason to ask for his removal.

In addition to the Vice Admiral, we ask that you replace the Deputy Undersecretary for Oceans and Atmosphere General Kelly. General Kelly is the appointee most directly charged with the day to day tending of the NPOESS management. He has been as forthcoming with the Congress and our Committee as has

been his boss; in other words, we can never get a straight answer out of him either. When the IG wanted to interview the manager involved in decision-making on NPOESS, it was General Kelly who answered the call rather than the Admiral. In fact, the Admiral would not even meet with the Inspector General

This program is essential to the economic life of our nation. NPOESS is necessary to give us the data the National Weather Service needs to provide accurate forecasts of weather conditions. The economic consequences and perhaps even the public health consequences of failure to fix the NPOESS situation are too dire for us to fail. However, we are convinced that this program will not succeed with the current leadership in place at NOAA. I urge you to hold these two presidential appointees accountable for managing a \$6.8 billion program into a \$7 billion cost overrun, with years of schedule delay. The very survival of NPOESS is at risk due to an imminent Nunn-McCurdy review at the Department of Defense.

We passionately believe that public service should require competence and personal accountability. At NOAA, the evidence is in that a monumental failure of leadership and management has occurred. We urge you to immediately intervene and replace Admiral Lautenbacher and General Kelly, holding them accountable for the dismal failure at NOAA.

Sincerely,



BART GORDON
Ranking Member



DAVID WU
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Environment,
Technology and Standards