

## Opening Statement

**Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN)**  
**Ranking Member**  
**U.S. House Committee on Science**

***Hearing: Ongoing Problems and Future Plans for NOAA Weather Satellites***  
**November 16, 2005**

None of us like coming together to talk about a program that is in trouble, but that is what we get paid to do. We are here today to discuss the National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System – NPOESS - an important joint environmental satellite program for NOAA and DOD with serious problems.

Admiral Lautenbacher, you met with me, Mr. Boehlert, Mr. Ehlers and Mr. Wu in late July to assure us of your cooperation. At that time, we heard that the cost overrun on this program could be as high as a billion dollars.

You were right to warn us those numbers were not robust and to take them with a grain of salt. That is the good news. The bad news is that as the numbers become more robust, the costs keep climbing.

The Executive Committee's own Independent Program Assessment Team has suggested that the real cost overrun is in the range of \$2 billion to \$3 billion.

A potential \$3 billion cost overrun on a \$6.5 billion program is simply incredible. Regardless of whether you look at contractor projections of paths out of this mess or the Independent Team's assessments, the least-cost solutions all require more money for FY2006 and FY2007 than called for in the baseline. That finding reinforces what the contractor on this project also says.

The one consistent message you have delivered to Congress, and the direction to contractors and the Independent Assessment Team, was that no new money could be pursued in the next two fiscal years.

It looks to me as if you are willing to play out the clock so that you can get through your term at NOAA without having to do the hard work of asking OMB and Congress to free up some more money now to save us money later.

Decisions about how to move forward seem to be painfully slow in coming. The longer it takes to settle on a solution, the fewer options we have and the more expensive they become.

Perhaps it is politics driving this behavior, perhaps it is weak management, or perhaps there is a good reason for this slow march towards a solution.

According to the ExComm's Independent Program Assessment team, the difference between more money next year and no new money until FY2008 is a billion dollars over the life of the program. The taxpayer is ill served by limiting options to those that are convenient for this Administration.

I want to urge you in the strongest possible terms to look at options that minimize total program costs, delivers satellites in time to avoid data gaps, and that offers the least risk of additional "surprises."

If you are unwilling to do that, I think you have to explain to this Committee why the Administration prefers an approach that would cost the taxpayer a billion dollars more than other approaches and risks the continuity of vital weather forecasting data.

I want to remind you that you promised in the July meeting that we would enjoy real cooperation from NOAA. I am disappointed at the record so far.

For example, six weeks ago, you received your Independent Program Assessment team's report showing that projected cost overruns would range from \$2 billion to \$3 billion. That event should have triggered a call to our staff or even directly to Members. Maybe you don't consider a growth in cost overrun projections from \$700 million to \$3 billion to be a big deal; but I do.

Another example of lack of cooperation lies in complying with our document request. We wrote on August 12 for documents and have sent a follow-up letter and we still do not have all the documents.

This Committee has the right and responsibility to understand what went wrong with this program and to weigh options for moving forward. We must be able to advise our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee about how to proceed.

I intend to see our document request fully complied with even if it requires a subpoena from this Committee to do it.

I trust that everyone understands this would not be about politics but about our institutional rights and obligations.

I believe you have not yet lived up to your pledge of full cooperation in July. It puts you in a somewhat difficult position as you come before us today to assure us that you are leading the agency in a manner to solve these problems. I hope we can move forward in a cooperative manner from here on out.

Thank you all for being here this morning. I look forward to your testimony.