

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**Ranking Member Brad Miller**

March 28, 2012

Energy & Environment Subcommittee Hearing

“To Observe and Protect: How NOAA Procures Data for Weather Forecasting”

Thank you, Chairman Harris. I also want to welcome the witnesses and thank them for being here to shed light on what has become a protracted problem for NOAA, but one that is now marked by a new urgency.

For years, the Nation’s multi-billion dollar weather and climate satellite programs have been at the center of this Committee’s investigations and oversight agenda. Despite relentless pressure from both sides of the aisle to get these programs under control, they continue to experience cost overruns and almost never launch on-schedule. Many of these problems existed before this Administration, but it is now the task of this Administration to fix those problems. In addition to inexcusably wasteful, the problems expose the country to a very real chance that we will see a gap in our weather and climate forecasting abilities, given the expected life of the weather satellites now flying.

From the deadliest tornado year in more than half a century, to the unprecedented heat wave this month, are facing severe, life-threatening, and record-breaking weather events across the country. Good weather data is more important than ever. Yes, satellites are expensive, but they are essential to protecting life and property, and the costs of inferior systems could be far greater.

So, today we are asking several questions. Is the time-frame realistic? Is the attempt to cobble together a backup system in the event that our current satellite-based systems fail while we wait for new systems to come online worth the cost? Or, is it simply time to rethink our reliance on satellites altogether, as some now argue.

Being stewards of the taxpayers’ dollar means that we have to manage these programs in the most fiscally-responsible way while avoiding a reduction of the service and protection we have come to expect. It also means that we have to recognize when we can tinker with what we have and when more

drastic action is necessary. Over the years, talented and innovative researchers and scientists in the public and private sector have developed a wide range of technologies and methods - such as weather radars, buoys, aerial data, wind profilers, and atmospheric sounders – that give us both depth and flexibility in anticipating the effects of weather. What I would like for us to learn today is how these and other technologies can complement the work of the satellites, or if, when combined, they can give us the same capability at less cost. Whatever the answer, we have to be strategic in our decisions, evaluating the benefits of the individual technologies while considering their cost and realistic lead-time for their development.

At this point, to avoid a potential weather data gap, maybe all we can do is cross our fingers and hope that the existing polar satellite lasts beyond its design life, buying us some time until the next satellite is successfully launched. But that's no way to plan our Nation's strategy for advanced weather forecasting. And we have to be prepared not to be that lucky. A weather data gap could occur as early as 2016, which gives us four years to develop, test, and have ready any capability to mitigate the gap. These are complicated and expensive systems, and four years is not a long time for such an undertaking. So I am interested to hear what NOAA's plans are, and what the other witnesses are suggesting as realistic and cost-effective strategies for minimizing the damage of this predicament.

Mr. Chairman, this should be a good hearing on one of the most important aspects of this Committee's jurisdiction. Thank you for holding this hearing today and for your staff working with my staff. I look forward to a lively and informative discussion today and with that, I yield back.