

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HEARING

An Insecure Forecast for Continuity of Climate and Weather Data: The NPOESS Weather Satellite Program

June 18, 2008

Statement of Subcommittee on Energy & Environment Ranking Member Bob Inglis (SC-4)

Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Lampson, for holding this hearing about the National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System, NPOESS. This hearing continues close oversight of this vital weather satellite program, oversight that started under Republican leadership of this Committee.

Last June, we met to discuss a GAO report's findings on the progress of the NPOESS program. Mr. Powner, you were here to present that report one year ago, and now you're back again with additional findings – this feels almost like a Satellite club reunion!

In June 2007, it seemed that the program was on track under the new plan. However, given that significant changes were being made to the capability of the system, I, and many of my colleagues, stressed that close oversight had to continue, or the repercussions would be costly.

And we're here again, and again we're stressing the importance of oversight. And rightly so, I think. Things are less "at ease" than they were last year. "Costly" is a good word to use to describe the progress of the program over the past 12 months. \$12.5 billion was the NPOESS price tag in June 2007. Today, it's \$13.6 billion. And there's another increase looming on the horizon. The Department of Defense has recently announced that if major management documents are not finalized by September, DOD will remove funding. If that happens, the Department of Commerce would be forced to follow suit and remove funding as well. This loss of funding would mean a significant setback in the investment and progress of the NPOESS program.

It is said NPOESS is "the most complex environmental satellite system ever developed," and given what we've gone through in this Committee alone in the past few years, I believe it. I also believe that all of us involved, Congress, NOAA, the Air Force, and NASA have a vested interest in making sure that the system succeeds, despite the complexities. NPOESS holds the capability for advanced climate and weather sensing, which, even in light of the cost, can mean great benefits for our country and the world.

NPOESS today is a \$13.6 billion program. That is a lot of taxpayer money. We need weather satellites that are launched on time and that provide data that informs everything from decisions about our military troop operations to forecasting the path of hurricanes.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.