

Opening Statement

Rep. Bart Gordon (D-TN)

Ranking Member

U.S. House Science Committee

Hearing: *The Future of NPOESS: Results of the Nunn-McCurdy Review of NOAA's Weather Satellite Program*

June 8, 2006

We are here this afternoon to take testimony on the plan for moving the NPOESS program forward.

The Nunn-McCurdy review is complete, but there is still much to do before this plan is solidified and implemented. I expect this is the first in a series of hearings the Committee will hold on the new program.

I don't want to start off with a confrontational tone this afternoon, but I want to be clear about what I need to have confidence in this plan – I need information.

At this point, I have only a bare-bones, heavily-censored description of the redesigned polar satellite program. That is simply not sufficient.

What do I know based on what has been shared? I know that the best case interpretation of this plan is that for more than \$4 billion above the original cost estimate, we are on a path to purchase four satellites instead of six, with fewer instruments and reduced capability.

Now that may be the best that can be done. Perhaps this plan may, in fact, deliver us the best combination of capabilities at the lowest cost on a schedule that limits the degradation in weather forecasting ability.

However, I cannot evaluate the proposed plan without much more documentation to explain this choice and the annual budget estimates that flow from the proposed baseline.

Additionally, we really need to understand not just the annual budget estimates, but also how reliable those estimates are. How much budgetary risk is attached to this plan? Right now, no one in this room can answer that question - or at least none of the witnesses knew the answer as recently as yesterday.

This Committee has been told many things about this program over the years. For example, we were told:

- that the program will cost \$6.8 billion dollars for six satellites with thirteen sensors.
- That the technical problems are manageable.
- That there is no delay in the schedule for the launch of the first satellite.
- That the cost overruns will not trigger the Nunn-McCurdy law's review provisions.

I could go on, but I think I have made my point. I do not believe that any of our witnesses have come here today to mislead this Committee. But I simply cannot endorse this program on the basis of your assurances alone.

I should add that Members and staff have had briefings by officials from DOD, NOAA and NASA, but more often than not the officials could not answer our questions.

In those meetings we have asserted our desire to see the underlying documents that lead to this Nunn-McCurdy decision. No documents have been made available to us. The Undersecretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Mr. Kreig, is said to have those documents and control them. He has to give his blessing before the Committee can have them. He was invited to testify, but is supposed to be on travel.

Apparently, there are no phones where he is at the moment so the Department of Defense could not get approval to provide the Committee with the documents we need. I hope the Chairman knows how much support he will get from me in the effort to get the Nunn-McCurdy decision package for our review.

Congress has a constitutional responsibility to oversee the programs that we authorize and fund. I would not be fulfilling my responsibility if I blindly accept the program as offered.

I want to see documentation that confirms the validity of this choice.

I want to see annual estimates of the budgets that are associated with the estimate of the proposed \$11.5 billion acquisition.

I want to understand what level of risk attaches both to the plan to maintain weather data continuity and to the cost estimates of this program.

I hope that we can go forward in a cooperative partnership to deliver this important satellite system to the nation. Thank you.