

## OPENING STATEMENT

### **Rep. David Wu (D-OR)**

Ranking Member, ETS Subcommittee  
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

Normally, Mr. Chairman, I would thank you for calling these hearings. However, I am concerned that this hearing may be premature.

Neither the Members nor the staff has received sufficient, substantive materials on the Nunn-McCurdy decision that would allow us to exercise real oversight; to do our job and be accountable for taxpayer dollars. The result is that the witnesses before us today can pretty much tell us anything they want and we can't sort out the hard facts from the hopeful scenarios.

Administrator Lautenbacher was very generous with his time in meeting with me yesterday. He briefed me at some length in an effort to reassure me that stretching the program out was a good thing and that this plan would not have any impact on weather forecasting abilities.

Perhaps those claims are true, if every element in the Nunn-McCurdy plan unfolds as hoped. But there are enormous risks built into the Nunn-McCurdy plan. For example, the plan assumes that the N-Prime satellite works as advertised. Given this project's track record, no one can be certain how it will perform in orbit.

The plan also assumes that we will have 13 successful launches of 13 satellites constructed by four different agencies on schedule in each case. Those 13 satellites all have to work as advertised for at least as long as planned. If any of these variables comes up short, there will either be radical revisions required, a loss of capability, or a troubling gap in coverage.

Not only is risk associated with providing continuous weather satellite coverage, but risk also overshadows the cost assessment. The Nunn-McCurdy plan says the base program should now cost \$11.5 billion. We do not know what level of confidence we should put in that number. It seems to me that since we are canceling one of the two key instruments for weather forecasting and starting an entirely new acquisition, that perhaps the confidence boundaries on that item should be very low. And even those items that are moving forward have had problems; problems that will need to be addressed and therefore, will cost money.

But that is the point. Until we see more information on what the DOD Cost Accounting Improvement Group (CAIG) actually says on all these items, we don't know how much confidence to put in the new bottom line number. I would not be surprised if the costs climb again, though I am hopeful that the rate of growth will decline.

But even if costs don't go up, it appears there are costs associated with this plan not included in the base program. For example, to use European satellite data for real-time forecasting models, we need our own ground station downlink capability. That too will cost money, but how much, we don't know. No one has been able to tell us.

Another example. Six instruments were dropped from the NPOESS program. However, DOD has simply invited those who might have an interest in that data to step up to the plate and pay for the instruments themselves. If, for example, Space Command decides they must have the SESS instrument and they put up the tens or even hundreds of millions that might cost, then it

will fly. But those dollars are not in the \$11.5 billion base program, as reconstituted by the Nunn-McCurdy review.

My message is two-fold. First, I want to see the documentation that led Undersecretary Kreig to certify this new version of the NPOESS program under Nunn-McCurdy. Until I see that, and can consult with staff and outside experts, I don't know how to evaluate what we will hear today. When we are dealing with a program that has overrun its budget from \$6.8 billion to at least \$11 billion, the time for wishful thinking should be behind us.

Second, we must find a way forward that maintains the quality and continuity of our weather forecasting system. Billions of dollars of our nation's GDP are tied to those forecasts, and not only quality of life, but actual American lives can hang in the balance. We can't afford to get this wrong.