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Congressional Hearing Notes  
Overview of NOAA's FY2012 Research and Development Budget Proposal  
House Science, Space and Technology Committee  
March 10, 2011

*On March 10, 2011, the House Science, Space and Technology Committee held a hearing on "An Overview of the Fiscal Year 2012 Research and Development Budget Proposals at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency." The following summary of the NOAA part of the hearing appeared as an article on SpacePolicyOnline.com that day.*

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrator Jane Lubchenco warned the House Science, Space and Technology Committee today that the Joint Polar Satellite System (JPSS) has already experienced about a 12-month delay and a gap in polar orbit weather satellite services is "highly likely" if the FY2011 funding situation is not resolved soon.

NOAA is operating at its FY2010 funding level under the Continuing Resolution (CR). The decision to terminate the National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System (NPOESS) and return to separate weather satellite systems for NOAA and DOD was made in concert with the FY2011 budget request so was not reflected in the FY2010 budget. Thus NOAA only has the amount of money that was allocated for NPOESS in FY2010 -- a program whose funding was shared with DOD -- to use for JPSS at the moment.

Lubchenco told Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) that NOAA needs \$910 million for FY2011 for JPSS. If Congress does not provide that level of funding, and contracts have to be interrupted, the "consequences will not be pretty." She said several times during the hearing that for every dollar that is not spent this year, it will cost \$3-5 dollars in the future.

She added that JPSS already has experienced "around a 12 month" slip and further delays in funding will cause more slips and we will "inevitably have a gap where we will not have the ability to do severe storm warnings as we do today." When asked by Representative Jerry McNerney (D-CA) if it already was inevitable, she clarified that it was "highly likely we will have a gap and the longer we wait the longer that gap gets." There is "great urgency" to resolving the funding issue, she stressed.

She also defended the DSCOVR and Jason-3 programs. DSCOVR started as the Triana program under the Clinton Administration and was opposed by many Republicans because it was championed by Vice President Gore and they felt its main purpose -- to look back at Earth from the L1 Sun-Earth Lagrange point -- was not meritorious. After a review by the National Research Council, additional sensors were added to provide data about space weather and the satellite was built, but it was put in storage during the George W. Bush Administration. NASA, NOAA and DOD now plan to launch it to contribute to space weather observations. Representative Harris (R-MD) asked why NOAA wanted to refurbish an 11-year-old satellite instead of having the private sector build and launch a new satellite to meet its needs. Lubchenco said the agency concluded that DSCOVR was the most cost effective approach.

Committee Chairman Ralph Hall (R-TX) asked about why funding for Jason-3, a satellite being built jointly with the European Space Agency that will measure sea level, was a priority in these difficult economic times. Lubchenco said that providing data to coastal communities on sea level was "vital."

She also defended NOAA's decision to reorganize and create a NOAA Climate Service, but assured Chairman Hall that the agency would not implement the reorganization until Congress approves. Chairman Hall introduced an amendment to H.R. 1 (the "full year CR") to prohibit NOAA from creating the climate service. The amendment was adopted by the House, but the bill was defeated in the Senate earlier this week.