



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Environment Subcommittee Hearing:

*“From Orbit to Operations:
How Weather Satellites Support the National Security Mission”*

January 13, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Franklin and Ranking Member Amo for convening this discussion on the importance of weather satellites. And thank you to our distinguished witnesses for appearing before the Committee today.

The United States’ ability to protect lives, property, and national security depends on the uninterrupted flow of weather, climate, and ocean observations provided by NOAA’s satellite system.

In my home state of California and across the West, wildfire seasons are becoming longer, more intense, and more destructive. In 2025 alone, California experienced a total of 8,036 wildfires resulting in over 500,000 acres burned and 31 lives lost. Our ability to anticipate ignition risk, detect active fires, track smoke, and support emergency response depends on timely, reliable environmental data. NOAA’s weather satellites provide that information, enabling firefighters and emergency managers to allocate resources, protect communities, and respond before disasters escalate.

But the importance of NOAA’s environmental satellite data extends well beyond civilian disaster response. NOAA’s satellites support essential functions across the federal government, from aviation safety and maritime operations to protecting vital infrastructure and economic interests. **NOAA’s mission is – *and must remain* – a civilian public service mission.**

At the same time, the data and services NOAA provides are indispensable to enhancing our nation’s national security operations. Weather, climate, and environmental data inform nearly every military operation, including flight planning, naval maneuvering, troop safety, and strategic logistics. The loss or degradation of NOAA satellite data would not only weaken civilian weather forecasting, but it would also undermine military readiness. The Department of Defense does not duplicate NOAA satellite capabilities, however, nor could it easily replace them. It simply makes sense for NOAA to maintain the federal weather satellite capabilities for the benefit of the Nation.

For decades, NOAA and DOD have worked together through partnerships that respect clear roles and shared interests. These collaborations – rooted in data sharing, research coordination, and operational foresight – demonstrate how civilian and defense agencies can work together effectively when responsibilities are well defined and governance is clear.

NOAA's expertise in environmental data collection and strategic analysis, combined with DOD's operational capabilities, creates a framework for joint projects and initiatives that leverage both agencies' strengths and maximize the return on investment of federal resources. One example is the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program, or DMSP. For more than 40 years, DMSP data has been used by both civilian and military forecasters, particularly in polar regions where observations are limited but operational demands are high.

Recent uncertainty surrounding the continuation of DMSP underscored just how vital these capabilities remain. Last July, the DOD abruptly announced the termination of the DMSP data provision to the civil user community, which resulted in a public outcry for the unexpected early decommission just as hurricane season was starting. Following this decision, DOD announced a push back of the sunset of DMSP to this fall to allow more time to bring on alternative data sources.

The initial termination of this program and public outrage reinforced a fundamental lesson: interruption of environmental data is not optional. Gaps in coverage create real-world consequences for forecasting accuracy, emergency response, and operational planning.

At the same time, history also offers a cautionary tale. The National Polar-orbiting Operational Environmental Satellite System, or NPOESS [N-Pose], was intended to merge civilian and defense satellite requirements into a single program. Instead, a series of difficulties in instrument development resulted in significant schedule delays and cost over-runs which ultimately led to the program's dissolution.

The lessons learned from NPOESS are not that interagency collaboration should be avoided - it is that collaboration must be structured with effective communication among the various stakeholders involved in the creation and advancement of a satellite system. Lessons learned from the failed NPOESS development led to the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellites, or GOES, program - a successful collaboration between NOAA and NASA.

As we look ahead, this Committee must ensure that NOAA's satellite programs are adequately funded, responsibly managed and protected from decisions that would degrade their core mission. We should strengthen partnerships that work, while avoiding arrangements that compromise accountability, data continuity, or NOAA's independence as a civilian science agency.

Maintaining that balance is essential to protecting lives, supporting national security, and ensuring that the United States remains a leader in environmental intelligence.

With that, I yield back.