

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

THE LANDSAT PROGRAM: MANAGEMENT, FUNDING, AND POLICY DECISIONS

November 26, 1991

OPENING REMARKS  
CHAIRMAN GEORGE E. BROWN, JR.

Five months ago the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology held a hearing titled "Scientific, Military, and Commercial Applications of the Landsat Program." The purpose of that hearing was to get an up-to-date assessment of the value of the Landsat program for applications such as global change research, national security planning, and natural resource management. We explicitly did not address policy issues during that hearing, deciding instead to save those issues for a later date. Today is that later date.

The focus of today's hearing is management, funding, and policy decisions. Let me take a moment to emphasize the word decisions. Over the past several years we have avoided making the policy decisions that are needed if this nation hopes to retain a civil land remote-sensing program of any kind into the next century. Although the United States pioneered this technology, its position has eroded significantly in recent years, and will collapse altogether unless policy decisions are made soon to keep this valuable national asset alive.

When I say soon, I mean very soon. A decision--and a commitment--to fund a follow-on spacecraft to Landsat 6 is needed now, or we won't have the spacecraft built in time to replace Landsat 6. Once the fate of Landsat 7 has been secured, then further decisions are needed on what the follow-on spacecraft will look like, how it will be procured, and the manner by which the data will be priced and distributed.

Last month I introduced "The National Land Remote-Sensing Policy Act" (H.R. 3614) as a means of helping push the policy-making process forward. It seems to have done just that. Yesterday, the Vice President met with members of the National Space Council and made some long over due--yet nonetheless very important--decisions concerning the future of this program. Today's hearing will provide an opportunity for Administration witnesses to report on that encouraging meeting, and to provide comments on H.R. 3614.

The hearing also will serve as an opportunity for non-government witnesses to give us their views on the best way to proceed with this program. The Landsat issue is exceedingly complex and involves many competing interests and perspectives, as I am sure our second panel will demonstrate. Nonetheless, these competing views cannot serve as the basis for inaction. The development of a new policy framework for Landsat cannot be postponed any longer.

I am pleased to have Admiral Truly here, speaking on behalf of NASA, and Assistant Secretary Andrews, speaking for the Department of Defense. I am eager to work with you both, and with the Administration and other interested parties, as we develop and implement a program that secures U.S. leadership in land remote-sensing.