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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR TOM DASCHLE
BEFORE THE
COMMERCE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND SPACE
MAY 6, 1992

Mr. Chairman, thank you for this opportunity to express my concern regarding the future of the Landsat program. I appreciate your addressing this important issue as chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space in your hearing today.

The data that has been collected by the Landsat program is of great value, from data used for scientific research on global change to that needed for national security, as in the recent images used by our military in the Persian Gulf conflict. These are only two examples of how the Landsat program has proved to be an important scientific achievement.

Unfortunately, the course that Congress and the Administration set for the Landsat program in the mid-1980's that would transfer its management and operation to the private sector has not developed as expected. We have now reached the point where it is imperative that we reevaluate the current policy and our objectives for the future of the Landsat program.

I would urge your subcommittee to address the current status of archived Landsat data. This data, most of which is archived at the Earth Resources Observation Systems (EROS) Data Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, is of great value in scientific research. The Landsat policies we develop in this Congress need to ensure that data collected by the Landsat system continues to be well preserved and accessible for scientific and commercial use in the future.

Another important consideration for the Landsat program is the continuity of data. As Landsat 6 nears completion and is prepared for launch and operation, we can waste no time in preparing for its successor, a Landsat 7 satellite. Our policies must address those procurement issues that will provide a high quality Landsat system at a reasonable cost to the federal government. The private sector also can play an important role in the development process and in sharing the costs and benefits of the Landsat program. We must examine these options closely. Ultimately, we must not allow our Landsat program to lapse, leaving future researchers with disappointing information gaps. We can and must do better than that as we develop Landsat policies.

Scientists and other researchers actively involved in studying the global change of our planet or developing other research that will benefit our nation and all mankind should be encouraged to continue their good work. We must design policies that will allow acquisition for important scientific research of valuable Landsat data at the reasonable cost of reproduction. This kind of action will undoubtedly facilitate and encourage further valuable research.

Foreign competition in Landsat technology has become much more intense in recent years, and the United States will need a comprehensive Landsat program to maintain a world leadership position in Landsat technology. It is my hope that we can develop a program that will continue the beneficial archiving practices we have in place, provide for the continuity of data from the Landsat system, establish fair pricing policies for this data used for important scientific research, and establish a viable commercial market for Landsat data in the future.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the efforts of the ranking member of the Subcommittee and my senior colleague from South Dakota, Senator Pressler. He has taken a special interest in this area, and I applaud his efforts to ensure that we maintain a sound Landsat program.

Again, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your work on this important issue and look forward to following the developments related to this hearing.