

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 13, 2026

The Honorable Pete Hegseth
Secretary of Defense
The Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

The Honorable Dr. Neil Jacobs
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Hegseth and Administrator Jacobs:

We write to request more information regarding the status of the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program (DMSP). We are encouraged by the U.S. Space Force's plan to sustain operations of the three remaining DMSP spacecraft through their functional end of life, currently estimated no earlier than 2028. While this extension buys critical time to cross-calibrate new instruments and prepare for transition to the planned replacement architecture, we are concerned that the systems being brought online may not fully restore the coverage, revisit frequency, and operational access that military and civilian forecasters have relied on with DMSP. We would welcome the opportunity to work with you to identify solutions to improve defense and civil forecasting abilities as DMSP transitions out of service.

For decades, DMSP's Special Sensor Microwave Imager/Sounder (SSMIS) has supported hurricane forecasting, severe-weather monitoring, polar and sea-ice analysis, and military operations in data-sparse and denied environments. That coverage is now shrinking as legacy polar-orbiting microwave sensors age out. We support the Department of Defense's (DoD) investment in the Weather System Follow-on-Microwave (WSF-M) program and urge the resolution of test-resource constraints to reach full operational capability as quickly as possible. WSF-M is designed for microwave imaging, however, so it does not fully replace the vertical atmospheric profiles that SSMIS provides. In addition, the eventual retirement of DMSP leaves the early-morning orbital plane without dedicated U.S. microwave coverage, creating coverage gaps during critical windows of storm intensification.

To improve and prevent degradation of numerical weather prediction (NWP) and tactical forecasting, DoD and NOAA should evaluate the transition across the broader space architecture, including commercial satellite systems that can complement government capabilities. Both DoD and NOAA have recognized the value of commercial space data; establishing clear validation and acquisition pathways now will ensure these capabilities are integrated into operational models before the remaining DMSP sensors degrade or fails.

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To clarify the transition pathway, we respectfully request a written response within 30 days addressing the following questions:

1. **WSF-M Readiness and Access.** What is the current operational integration timeline for WSF-M data for military and civilian forecasters? What specific capability or coverage gaps will remain after WSF-M achieves full operational capability?
2. **DMSP Data Quality and Sensor Degradation.** How are DoD and NOAA monitoring and cross-calibrating performance across the remaining DMSP sensors? What specific degradation or quality thresholds will trigger the down-weighting or exclusion of DMSP data streams prior to 2028? Will DoD continue to share DMSP data with NOAA through the satellites' functional end of life?
3. **Commercial Augmentation.** What are the current results of NOAA's Commercial Data Program (CDP) pilots and DoD evaluations regarding commercial microwave sounders, radio occultation instruments, and commercial data assimilation into the NWP models? What procurement, cybersecurity, data-rights, latency, risk factors, and model-integration steps remain before commercial data can be used at scale within operational models? What is the status of developing assessment criteria and validating new forward operators and assimilation tools for commercial data at the Joint Center for Satellite Data Assimilation (JCSDA)?
4. **Governance and Resources.** Which DoD component is primarily responsible for setting requirements, budgeting, acquiring, validating, and integrating space-based commercial weather data? How are DoD and NOAA coordinating this transition? Are current and planned resources sufficient to sustain transition activities and onboard commercial capabilities prior to DMSP end-of-life?

Weather data continuity is essential to national security, public safety, and economic resilience. Extending DMSP is a promising step, and we urge DoD and NOAA to proactively identify and fill anticipated gaps before legacy degradation or replacement delays create preventable risks. We look forward to your response and to working with you to maintain modern, uninterrupted environmental intelligence.

Sincerely,



John Hickenlooper
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator