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S.O.S. - Save Our Satellites!

The vacuum of space sucks up money as easily as it does air. A combination of budget cuts and pie-in-the-sky projects has left a void in our global satellite network and jeopardized our ability to prepare for severe weather.

Storms cause billions of dollars in damage every year, but the damage would be far worse if it weren't for the early warning systems that give people time to find shelter. The crux of these systems is our nation's fleet of orbital satellites, which monitor the entire planet in an effort to keep us safe. Unfortunately our aging satellites have fallen into a sorry state of disrepair, due to launch delays and dwindling funds.

Where has all the money gone? To the moon, and to Mars! Two objects that are millions of miles away from each other and even further removed from our daily lives. Exploring the empty space around us is nowhere near as important as protecting the populous places in which we all live. Our national space program should devote most of its funding to projects that best serve the public, meaning more money for earth satellites, and less *Lost in Space*.

The need to study the earth's climate is more urgent than ever, now that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has announced 2006 was the warmest year on record. For as the world heats up, so will the weather. We cannot afford to skimp on meteorological equipment no matter how expensive it may seem, because the true price is not what it costs in dollars and cents, but the number of people it helps save.

Let the White House know the country deserves a practical space program that recognizes the needs of its taxpayers. So next Tuesday when the president makes his state of the union address, instead of trying to put men on Mars, we get a more accurate weather forecast.

Author's Note

The preceding advocacy message was prompted by a study conducted by the National Academy of Sciences and sent to an online mailing list of U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S.PIRG) activists along with an electronic petition they could fill out.

For More Information

Kaufman, Marc. "Cutbacks Impede Climate Studies: U.S. Earth Programs In Peril, Panel Finds." Washington Post 16 Jan. 2007: A01.

Revkin, Andrew. "Scientists Warn of Diminished Earth Studies from Space." New York Times 16 Jan. 2007.