

helped NOAA to improve the accuracy of hurricane track forecasts. If Hurricane Irene had occurred 10 years ago, the less-accurate predictions would have led to the evacuation of the Atlantic coast of Florida.

Married and divorced

The JPSS has a tortuous history. It began in 1994 when NOAA and DOD proposed combining their separate polar-orbiting constellations into a single next-generation set of six satellites, estimated to cost \$6.5 billion and save \$1.3 billion. By the time the Office of Science and Technology Policy had reorganized the system in 2010, the cost had soared to nearly \$15 billion for four satellites, and DOD split off to build its own constellation. Now a two-satellite program, with the second satellite to launch in 2021, the JPSS is officially estimated to cost \$12 billion through 2024. But the GAO last year warned that partly because of the loss of support for each other's missions, the JPSS and DOD satellite programs are both likely to incur further overruns and delays.

"The [JPSS] program currently finds itself in the middle of a metaphorical chicken-and-egg paradigm," a science committee report stated. "On one hand, NOAA has indicated that [it] cannot develop a credible baseline for costs and capabilities without a stable and predictable budget horizon." On the other hand, the report said, Congress is skeptical of entrusting a program that has such a dismal record with enough funding to get the job done. **David Kramer**

NSF launches family-friendly initiative

The National Science Foundation is introducing new workplace flexibility policies to make it easier for people to both pursue a research career and raise a family. "I was absolutely thrilled" to hear about the NSF Career-Life Balance Initiative, says Angela Speck, an astrophysics professor at the University of Missouri who has a spouse in academia and two children. "It sends a message that it's okay to take a break." Not only will the initiative help those who want to have or adopt children, she says, but it will also make it easier for supervisors to "find ways to make it work. It's an important move."

At a White House event marking the 26 September rollout of NSF's new initiative, First Lady Michelle Obama said,

"If we're going to out-innovate and out-educate the rest of the world, we've got to open doors for everyone. We need all hands on deck, and that means clearing hurdles for women and girls as they navigate careers in science, technology, engineering, and math [STEM]."

The 10-year plan is intended to "provide greater work-related flexibility for women and men in research careers," NSF director Subra Suresh said at a press briefing. One goal is to help raise the percentage of newly tenured science and engineering positions filled by women 10 years from now to match the percentage of doctorates granted to women today. Currently, women in STEM fields earn 41% of the PhDs but make up only 28% of the tenure-track faculty. In physics, those numbers are about 19% and 14%, respectively (see the article by James Trefil and Sarah Swartz on page 49).

Among other things, the NSF Career-Life Balance Initiative will

- Allow grant recipients to defer their awards for up to one year to care for their newborn or newly adopted children.

- Allow grant recipients to suspend their awards to take parental leave.

- Provide supplements to cover research technicians to maintain labs while principal investigators are on family leave.

- Promote family friendliness for panel reviewers by allowing them to conduct reviews remotely.

- Continue to encourage research that assesses the effectiveness of policies aimed at keeping women in the STEM pipeline.

Suresh said that the initial steps "involve taking highly successful best practices ... that have been in place only in small pockets of the National Science Foundation, and elevating them to an agency-wide activity." He added that some "seemingly simple policy steps" can be implemented "irrespective of what the budget climate is," and that they will have "a huge impact over the course of many years."

Toni Feder

Solar Decathlon has wetlands and wool but little sunshine

Nineteen participants in the fifth biennial Solar Decathlon contest in September came to Washington, DC, from as far away as China and New Zealand to showcase their designs for super-efficient homes. Academic teams assembled the fully furnished

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