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I rise to urge my colleagues to support H. Res. 1231. Let's review the technological, scientific, and political accomplishment that the TIROS I satellite represents.

In October of 1957, the launch by the Soviet Union of the Sputnik satellite struck fear in the hearts of Americans. Sputnik II went into space weighing over 1,000 pounds and carrying a dog. Meanwhile, the United States was developing far smaller satellites and experiencing troubles and public setbacks. On December 6, 1957, a Vanguard rocket failed to launch a U.S. satellite into space when it exploded on national television. In January 1958, the U.S. successfully launched a 31-pound Explorer I satellite, but even this victory was quickly followed by the loss of another Vanguard satellite in February. As the early space race continued through 1958 and 1959, the Soviet Union always seemed to be a step ahead of the United States.

The shock of Sputnik and the fear that the United States was losing its competitive edge inspired a national effort to prove and improve American leadership in the fields of science, math, and engineering. The U.S. poured energy and resources into basic research and development as well as science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education. Less than 3 years after the launch of Sputnik, these investments were beginning to pay off. The usefulness of satellites to observe the Earth remained unproven, and by 1960, U.S. scientists and engineers had designed and built a new series of satellites to test the proposition and to demonstrate American dominance.

The first launch of TIROS in April of 1960 was a clear U.S. victory in the space race, and it was the world's first meteorological satellite and the first to relay video images of the Earth from above. TIROS represented a scientific milestone and a clear message to our rivals and to ourselves that we had an ``eye in the sky'' and we could watch the planet.

During the 78 days that it was in operation, TIROS I sent home almost 23,000 images, including those of a tropical storm, the cloud system of a large extratropical cyclone in the Gulf of Alaska, and the pack ice in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Meteorologists used the transmissions to make the first accurate weather forecasts based on data gathered from space. The TIROS I program initiated a revolution in meteorological science and was the first step in the establishment of satellite storm tracking and warning systems that subsequently have saved countless lives. It proved that satellites could be useful tools for studying the planet and acquiring information to be used immediately for predictions and decision-making.

The design, the construction, the launch, and the operation of the TIROS I was carried out by a team from NASA, the U.S. Army Signal Corps, Fort Monmouth, the U.S. Weather Bureau, the U.S. Naval Photographic Interpretation Center, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, Lockheed, Douglas, Martin Marietta. I am proud that central New Jersey can rightly claim a large share of the credit for TIROS I, which was engineered and manufactured in central New Jersey by RCA Astro-Electronics. One of the two command and data acquisition centers was located at Camp Evans. Many of the scientists and technicians and engineers who worked on this have recently gathered to celebrate this accomplishment.

But five decades later, it's too easy to take for granted the U.S. victory in the space race and the technological developments that were pioneered by TIROS and its successors. Most of us give little thought to the satellites that bring us our daily weather images. There's the story, perhaps apocryphal, of the politician who said, “We don't need weather satellites when we have the Weather Channel.” Well, we do. From solar cells and tape recorders to cell phone cameras and GPS systems, the contributions that derive from the TIROS program are not confined to outer space.

TIROS is a reminder of what we can achieve when we apply sufficient energy and resources to research and development in pursuit of a national goal. The story of TIROS should be a guide to rebuilding our economy. It's a blueprint for how we can create not just jobs but whole new industries. It's the story of how America remains competitive.

Let us honor this legacy by maintaining the urgent spirit of discovery and innovation embodied by the TIROS I team.