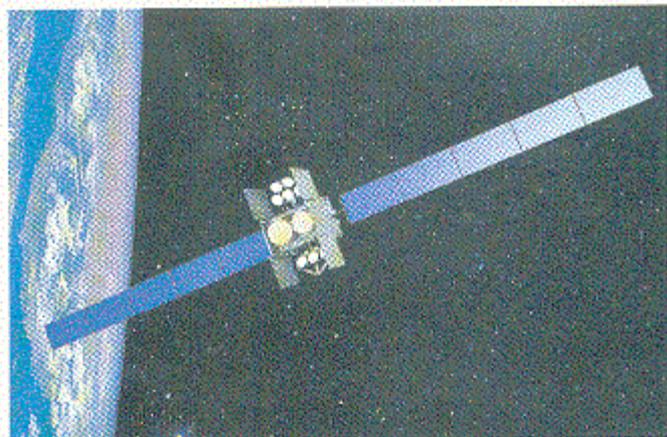


slow task because Congress is suspicious of authorizing funds for unspecified purposes. Young agreed, saying that lawmakers understand the issue, but have been reluctant to do anything to change the way business is done.

Teets also said that the process of reprogramming funds needs to change. "Reprogramming is a six-to-nine month process," he said. Sometimes, extra funds must



Boeing photo

Space acquisition is improving, but problems remain.

Space Acquisition Progressing

Improvements instituted about a year ago to the nation's ailing space acquisition system are starting to have a positive effect, according to a blue-ribbon panel. It added that there is much left to do.

"We were quite pleased with the progress we observed," said A. Thomas Young, chairman of the Task Force on Acquisition of National Security Space Programs. However, he said, many areas "still need some attention." The task force in August released a "One Year Review" of its September 2003 study. (See "Washington Watch: The Problem With Space Programs," November 2003, p. 12.)

Young said there has been a concerted movement to correct problems that started hampering the military space program in the 1990s but that many of the systems that are now experiencing repeated cost overruns and delays may always be hobbled by the "congenital defect" of having been started in that era. Young spoke with Pentagon reporters at an August discussion hosted by Peter B. Teets, undersecretary of the Air Force and DOD's executive agent for space.

In the 1990s, Young said, cost replaced mission success as the driving force behind most space programs, and the military surrendered too much program oversight to contractors in an effort to save money. Optimistic projections about a booming commercial space market never materialized, and many programs were saddled with costs far higher than anticipated. Young said the troubles of the 1990s were "no one's fault" but simply the collision of market vagaries and ideas that everyone thought would work but didn't.

Young said the task force's top finding remains that space programs need to be given more "management reserve" funding to deal with unexpected problems as they crop up.

According to Teets, fixing that problem has been a

be found to correct a problem "by next week," he explained.

Young noted that the cost to postpone a solution is usually triple what it would have been if the reprogramming action had moved quickly. If the space executive were allowed to shuffle funds between programs doing well to those with problems, Young said, "the probability of getting the space portfolio right is pretty high."

"Space is different" from buying tanks or ships or airplanes, he explained, because of the limited number of items purchased, requirements that change to accommodate real-time needs, and the high-tech nature of the field. Space systems shouldn't follow the rules set out for those other things, Young said.

According to Young, the Pentagon has made good progress in restraining requirements growth within space programs. However, he said that serving the needs of both the intelligence world and military warfighters continues to feed mission creep—the addition of unplanned capabilities.

There still is no mechanism—other than direct intervention by the Secretary of Defense and Director of Central Intelligence—to solve differences between the military and civil entities of the Intelligence Community. Such conflict resolution has to be done "further down" the chain of command, Young said.

Rising cost is being held in check through independent cost and program reviews, he noted. The fact that "mission success has replaced cost" as a primary program driver is a step in the right direction, he said.

However, Young believes that the government's ability to manage space programs effectively remains seriously "eroded." Development of a space cadre to manage space programs effectively is also slow.

Young said that there are simply "not enough experienced people in space acquisition." In his view, when space programs fail, they do it in a catastrophic way, and it is almost always a human error that caused the problem. ■