

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Chairman

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

A Review of NASA's Exploration Program in Transition: Issues for Congress and Industry

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

Thank you Chairman Palazzo for holding this important, and timely hearing. And thanks to our witnesses for taking the time to share their many years of valuable experience and insight.

I have seen such great Americans, who are friends of mine – like General Tom Stafford, Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong and Gene Cernan – risk their lives to explore space and demonstrate the strength and resolve of America. They are real heroes. They didn't know if they would return.

Last year, I listened to their strong testimony and I agreed with them that the president's plan took our country in the wrong direction. His decision on human exploration of space undermined 5 years of broad bipartisan and bicameral support, and was made without clear direction or analysis.

The president's action has spawned thousands of lost jobs and cast fear and doubt throughout the industry. Last year, after careful consideration, and contrary to the president's objections, Congress laid out its plan and passed the NASA Authorization Act of 2010.

The debate is over. This act is the law. NASA has its direction. The administration needs to acknowledge this, and act accordingly. Congress – both the majority of Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate – are committed to ensuring that NASA follows the law. We have heard favorable comments from those same astronauts who risked it all for our space program. They told us of the importance of continuing to develop these exploration systems, for ensuring we can get back to the Space Station, and preparing for missions beyond low Earth orbit.

But as we have seen from the FY2012 *budget* request, the administration is trying to ignore the thrust of this act. We expect NASA to proceed with the uninterrupted development of the Space Launch System (SLS) and Multi Purpose Crew Vehicle (MPCV) that builds upon – and takes maximum advantage of – the significant work and capabilities that already exist. There is broad agreement on the importance of minimizing disruptions to an industrial base that is already reeling from the end of the space shuttle program. NASA should make the most expeditious choices possible to minimize the adverse impact on the aerospace workforce and industrial base. If further bidding is required – and I'm not suggesting that it is - NASA should ensure it has truly qualified bidders that should be called upon to demonstrate their financial strength and technical capabilities to give some assurance that they can follow-through and finish what they begin.

In total, the NASA authorization provides \$10.8 billion over three years to continue the exploration systems work. That is a significant commitment. NASA must not delay. Lengthy studies are no longer needed. Lengthy new starts will not be tolerated. We are well beyond that point. Congress has given clear direction and we expect NASA to comply.

Before closing, I want to address a short statement to Mr. Cook, and be clear this is not directed at you personally. This Committee did not receive your testimony until a little after 4:00 pm yesterday. We have had very limited time to review your statement in any detail, which does a serious disservice to the hearing process. This isn't the first time that NASA's statements have arrived at the 11th hour. Even in the prior Congress under Democratic control, NASA's testimony was prone to late arrival. So when you return to headquarters, I need you to tell your folks that this is an unacceptable practice and that I do not expect it to be continued. I will not condone this type of bureaucratic behavior.