

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Chairman
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

NASA's Commercial Cargo Providers; Are They Ready to Supply the Space Station in the Post-Shuttle Era?

May 26, 2011

Thank you, Mr. Palazzo, for yielding me some time to inject a couple of quick comments.

NASA's commercial cargo program was initiated in 2006, five years ago, with the Commercial Orbital Transportation Systems (COTS) program. It was - and is - a technically challenging program to stand-up two commercial launch systems, even for the seemingly routine delivery of cargo to the ISS. But the procurement strategy also broke with NASA tradition by allowing the agency to use its Space Act Agreement authority to fund the development of these systems. Two years later, NASA signed contracts valued at \$3.5 billion with the same two COTS-funded companies for cargo resupply services, even though neither of these companies had flown any demonstration flights.

So what started as a reasonable step-by-step approach to develop and prove capabilities first, followed by a competitive acquisition, did not happen. NASA simply ran out of time and is now gambling the future of Space Station on the success of two very new launch systems.

We – NASA, Congress, our space station partners – expect these companies to perform. It is my sincere hope and desire that they perform and meet their contract goals. There is no plan B if they encounter severe technical or schedule challenges, and I want them to succeed. I simply regret that there continues to be so much uncertainty about our nation's ability to reliably get cargo to station with the final shuttle flight now less than two months away. It is unfortunate that the decisions of this Administration have created so many questions and turmoil in our outlook for space.

I join with Mr. Palazzo in welcoming our witnesses this morning, and I look forward to your testimony.