

OPENING STATEMENT
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Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology

*Options and Issues for NASA's Human Space Flight Program:
Report of "Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans" Committee*

Tuesday, September 15, 2009, 2:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today's important hearing on Options and Issues for NASA's Human Spaceflight Program. I want to welcome my good friends Norm Augustine, Mike Griffin and Joe Dyer who have agreed to testify before us today. America's space program owes you a debt of gratitude for the important roles each of you have played, and continue to play. I want to thank you for coming and sharing your wealth of knowledge and experience with us.

In the aftermath of the Columbia tragedy, we did some national soul-searching. The Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB) admonished us for a "failure of national leadership" that it said contributed to the accident and to NASA's inability to finish earlier programs deemed as hoped-for replacements for the Space Shuttle. The CAIB acknowledged that human spaceflight is a risky endeavor and observed, "the design of the system should give overriding priority to crew safety, rather than trade safety against other performance criteria, such as low cost and reusability." Crew safety is my number one priority. I do not think we would be where we are in space today if America had not paid so much attention to this vital concern.

The Columbia Accident Investigation Board also encouraged us to clarify our goals in space so they would be worthy of the risks. I was encouraged in February of 2004 when the Bush Administration unveiled the Vision for Space Exploration, because it gave NASA a clear direction, with measurable goals, that had been lacking. NASA was directed to complete the International Space Station so it could be used by all the international partners for microgravity research into new vaccines and other promising bio-medical research, as well as research the long-term effects of spaceflight on humans. That vision also promised to move us beyond low Earth orbit, by re-establishing our capabilities that have been lost since 1972, allowing us to return to the Moon our nearest neighbor in space. It is my opinion that NASA has the greatest chance of success if given a clearly defined destination and the clearly defined design requirements that go with it.

The Congress held many hearings after the vision was announced, and in the end agreed with the goals and direction of the plan proposed. I think it is important to note that both the 2005 and 2008 NASA Authorization Acts reflect broad, bipartisan, bicameral support for the elements of that original vision. Any Administration should carefully consider how difficult that level of consensus is, and how difficult it could be to reestablish. Our greatest concern then-as-well-as-now, has been the inadequate level of funding being requested, and the gap between the retirement of the Space Shuttle and development of the follow-on Constellation system. In the ensuing years those problems have only gotten worse.

I am not a fan of increased spending, but I have always thought our human spaceflight program gives the United States so much to be proud of, and carries within it the promise of significant breakthroughs in healthcare, defense, and alternative energy technologies.

Mr. Chairman, in many ways it's hard for me to understand why the President is seeking new options at all when there has been an agreed upon plan for several years. Why don't we just fund the program we've all agreed to? Why should multi-billion dollar bailouts of banks and insurance companies come at the expense of our talented scientists, engineers and technicians who make the impossible look easy? I think many of us agree that it would take a very small fraction of our federal budget, just tenths-of-one-percent, to make a significant difference in our human spaceflight goals. But if even that level of funding is not forthcoming, we must be very careful how we proceed because we have a lot at stake, and crew safety should be paramount.

Mr. Augustine's panel reports that commercial launch services hold some promise, and our Committee has supported the development of several commercially-based ideas such as NASA's Commercial Orbital Transportation System and ISS Cargo Resupply Services, but commercial services should not be considered a cheap substitute for lack of national leadership in human spaceflight. Our NASA Authorization Acts and other legislation for the FAA Office of Commercial Space Transportation have encouraged prize competitions designed to inspire smaller private companies to develop innovative technologies. Just this past Saturday, Armadillo Aerospace of Rockwall, Texas became the first company to qualify for the \$1 million top prize of NASA's Northrop Grumman Lunar Lander Challenge at Caddo Mills Municipal Airport. I applaud John Carmack and his team for their innovative and creative thinking. These are exciting and useful ventures, but in our desire to save money let us not forget that you get what you pay for, and when it comes to transporting humans into space our overriding priority should be crew safety, not lowest cost or reusability.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to today's hearing, and I yield back my time.