

OPENING STATEMENT

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

The Future of NASA: Perspectives on Strategic Vision for America's Space Program

December 12, 2012

Good morning, and welcome to today's hearing. I want to especially recognize our colleague and friend, The Honorable Robert Walker, the former Chairman of this committee, for agreeing to testify here today. Bob it's good to see you. But I thank *all* our witnesses for being with us. I recognize that a lot of time and effort goes into the preparation of hearing testimony. I want you all to know that your expert knowledge and vast experience is very useful to this Committee and Congress as we consider legislation, so thank you for taking the time to appear here today.

There are a number of significant issues confronting NASA and its space program: a diminishing number of missions under development in the space sciences arena; an aeronautics budget that can no longer support full-scale demonstration flights; and no clearly articulated vision for our human exploration program beyond the International Space Station.

With regard to human space flight, during the national debate following the Columbia accident nearly ten years ago, we emerged with guiding principles and goals that were overwhelmingly endorsed by both Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate, resulting in the NASA Authorization Acts of 2005, and 2008. Even though funding was often less than many of us recommended, there was a consensus on the overall strategic direction. That consensus was short lived when this Administration, with no notice, abruptly canceled Constellation via submission of the FY2011 budget. The current agreement – if it can be called that – is not a consensus as much as it is a compromise. No one got everything they wanted, but the lack of a clear consensus - grounded in an agreement on national priorities - resulted in no effective way to prioritize the many competing demands. It has been clear over the last few budget cycles that there are fundamental disagreements.

Constellation was an integrated development plan to first replace the space shuttle's access to the space station in low Earth orbit and then evolve over time into heavy-lift rockets allowing NASA take longer strides and once again reach beyond low Earth orbit, to the Moon and beyond. At Congress's insistence the present compromise includes a heavy lift rocket development program, but the general lack of consensus on goals and destination has sown the seeds for disappointment as three large development programs, the Space Launch System, the Orion crew capsule, and the Commercial Crew program compete for the same diminishing resources in NASA's Exploration Systems budget. Since the Commercial Crew program supports the ISS, perhaps it should more appropriately be funded by the Space Operations budget. The Administration, Congress, and NASA should all look for ways to eliminate waste and duplication.

We are in a very challenging budget environment that will be with us for the next several years. Fiscal realities demand that NASA become more efficient and sized correctly to accomplish its goals, but consensus will have to be re-established among the agency's stakeholders to clarify NASA's strategic vision, goals, and missions.

The good work that NASA has done, and that NASA can do in the future, is so important to me. I want to preserve our International Space Station, and as a strategic goal to go beyond it. But it's not likely with this Congress – and this electorate – that we can expect vast sums for the Moon, Mars, or an asteroid. We can't go to Mars until our people can go to the grocery store. In other words, it's about the economy. The economy has to improve before NASA funding increases. I want us to work together to ensure that the American people get the kind of results that NASA is capable of producing and has demonstrated so often. We have a very distinguished panel of witnesses today and I look forward to this hearing sparking a much-needed national dialogue about NASA's future. This group is uniquely qualified to start this very important discussion by sharing their own perspectives about the strategic direction of America's space program.