

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
“America’s Human Presence in Low-Earth Orbit”
May 17, 2018

Good morning, and welcome to our distinguished witnesses. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on *“America’s Human Presence in Low-Earth Orbit.”*

In 1991, the House voted for the first time to reject an attempt to cancel the Space Station program. More attempts were made to cancel the Station program in subsequent years, but each time, it was kept alive. Those votes to continue the Space Station weren’t easy ones, given a series of redesigns, cost growth, and other challenges with the program during its development.

I mention this history, Mr. Chairman, because had Congress not made a commitment to support the Space Station and, later, to extend its operations, we could well have missed acquiring essential knowledge about how to live and safely work in low-Earth orbit and beyond. We also would have missed an opportunity to inspire our young people to excel, something the ISS continues to do in classrooms across our nation.

Without the International Space Station, would we have in place a durable, multi-nation, international partnership that has strengthened this nation, its global leadership, and the vision of peaceful cooperation in outer space? Would we have laid the ground work for developing a commercial resupply service, and soon, a commercial crew transportation capability that can help enable sustained commercial engagement in low-Earth orbit?

Looking ahead, as we debate the future of the International Space Station, we find ourselves facing a decision of equal importance to the one we faced in 1991.

The NASA Transition Authorization Act of 2017 established the long-term goal of sending humans to Mars. We know that such a multi-decadal undertaking will be challenging and expensive, and achieving it will be even more challenging if we are also continuing to support the estimated \$3-3.5 billion annual cost of keeping the International Space Station operating.

At the same time, the ISS supports important research and engineering activities, both public and private, and provides a stepping stone for exploration. For that reason, the Transition Act also called for an International Space Station Transition Plan to establish an orderly process by which alternative orbital platforms might be considered and potentially brought on as replacements for the ISS.

Although we only recently received the Plan, the Administration decided in its Fiscal Year 2019 budget request to propose ending direct federal funding of the International Space Station in 2025.

That is a bold proposal, and one that raises a lot of questions.

Mr. Chairman, the future of the International Space Station is of great consequence to our continued leadership in space exploration and utilization. Decisions as to its future should not be made lightly, nor

without sufficient information and debate. As Members of the Science Committee, we need to roll up our sleeves, ask the right questions, and focus on the core issues needing our attention.

In that regard, I hope this morning's hearing will shed light on:

1. The costs of conducting research on the Space Station versus an alternative module or platform;
2. Whether the commercial market will be ready to support a purely "commercial" space station in 2025 without direct U.S. government funding, and if not, what level of government funding would be needed;
3. Whether a National Laboratory in low- Earth orbit should be continued following the end of Space Station operations; and
4. The conditions and resources that would be needed to transition basic and applied biological and physical sciences research to a commercial or nongovernmental platform.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, there is a lot we need to examine as we contemplate the future of the International Space Station. I hope this morning's discussion is just the first of a series of hearings so that Committee Members will have the chance to ask questions of the other International Space Station stakeholders who are not represented today. We will need that information if we are to move forward with a thoughtful and constructive NASA Authorization bill. Thank you, and I yield back.