OPENING STATEMENT
The Honorable Steven M. Palazzo (R-MS), Chairman
Subommittee on Space and Aeronautics
An Overview of the NASA Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate Budget for Fiscal Year 2013

April 26, 2012

Good morning and welcome to today's hearing on NASA's FY 2013 Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate budget request. I want to thank our witnesses for taking time from their busy schedules to appear before the Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee. I realize you and your staff devoted considerable effort preparing for your appearance, and I want to assure you that your wisdom and expertise will be of immense help to our committee today and in the months and years ahead.

Aeronautics research and development, and the technologies they spin off are critical to our national security, and to the ongoing success of our nation's aerospace industrial base, which is our country's greatest source of exports. No other enterprise has played a greater role producing innovative aeronautics technologies than NASA.

Since its founding nearly 100 years ago as the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, NASA technologies have made possible today's domestic civil and military aerospace industries. Across the spectrum from fundamental research in airfoil designs, materials research, and high-speed flight to highly integrated systems research activities such as turbine engines and innovations in air traffic management technologies, NASA's workforce of scientists and engineers have helped sustain the preeminence of American aerospace products, providing an enormous source of high-paying jobs.

Our position, though, is being challenged by the emergence of aerospace industries abroad. If our domestic industry is to maintain leadership in the years ahead, it's essential that research and development continue to produce more efficient, cleaner, and robust aircraft, not only to distinguish our products from competitors, but to preserve the role of aviation as the safest, fastest, most convenient, and most environmentally benign source of transport.

The growth of overseas competition occurs at a time when NASA's aeronautics R&D funding is on the decline and continues to shrink, chiefly for reasons related to agency budgets. The FY2013 request of $551 million is $18 million below current levels. Today aeronautics spending accounts for about 3 percent of NASA's overall budget, compared to about 7 percent of the budget in FY2000.

During the middle of the last decade, in an effort address declining budgets, NASA aeronautics research and development was restructured to focus most of ARMD's portfolio on foundational research. In the years since, the agency has been able to leverage industry investment in a number of research areas, but a report recently issued by the National Research Council concludes that continuing down the path of emphasizing foundational research no longer makes good sense, and instead recommends that NASA reinstitute a cadence of relatively inexpensive flight research programs that are of a higher order of scale and sophistication than being currently flown.

To offset the costs of flight research, the NRC proposes that NASA phase out the majority of its lower-priority aeronautics activities. The report also stresses the intrinsic value of flight research, suggesting that the agency will be able to mature technologies to a higher level, thus ensuring their adoption by industry.

I look forward to discussing ARMD's research strategy and the NRC report, and gaining our witnesses insights on the best path forward.

I want to again thank our witnesses for appearing. We have an excellent group of experts, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.