

OPENING STATEMENT
THE HONORABLE RALPH HALL (R-TX)
Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology

NASA's Fiscal Year 2011 Budget Request and Issues
Thursday, February 25, 2010, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to working with you on the important issues facing NASA and I thank you for holding today's hearing on their fiscal year 2011 budget proposal. Thanks to your leadership NASA today is benefiting from the guidance provided in the NASA Authorization Act of 2008.

I also want to welcome the NASA Administrator, General Bolden to his first appearance before our Committee. We look forward to hearing the details of the Administration's proposals.

NASA's fiscal year 2011 proposal is a radical departure from the consensus that emerged after the Columbia accident. In fact, the national debate after the accident helped to clarify many of the guiding principles and goals that were endorsed by both Republicans and Democrats in the subsequent NASA Authorizations. The Columbia Accident Investigation Board clearly warned us about the inherent risks of a human space flight program that does not have vigorous and engaged national leadership. The CAIB also stressed the importance of working toward established goals, not flexible paths, and warned against unbounded technology development programs that, lacking clear requirements and metrics, are likely to fall prey to future budget reductions. As a mission-driven organization NASA performs best with clear goals – and destinations.

I am deeply troubled about the future viability of America's human space flight program. On the eve of completing the International Space Station and retiring the Space Shuttle, I cannot understand how the Administration can propose such an ill-conceived decision to cancel the Constellation program without providing a compelling alternative plan with measurable goals and adequate resources. This budget proposal, relying as heavily as it does on the unproven capabilities of a nascent commercial space industry, contains very few details. At worst, I am afraid that it's reliance on commercial is unfounded, and as a consequence, it not only threatens

our leadership in space and our utilization of the International Space Station, but it also risks the loss of much of our aerospace industrial base and our highly-skilled workforce.

I am also bothered by the apparent diminution of crew safety in this request. Except for vague assurances that safety will not be undermined, I see no detail explaining how NASA plans to ensure that commercial systems will be equal to the expectations that guided the development of Constellation.

Until we in the Congress have had a chance to examine the details of NASA's proposal and develop the appropriate legislation, I hope you will adhere to the intent of the Appropriators which is to continue with the Constellation development in FY2010.

General Bolden, I appreciate the fact that you accept responsibility for the poor way this budget was publicly rolled out, and I want you to take a message back to those who played an active role in its unveiling that such an exercise is ultimately counter-productive. This committee has been the most ardent supporter of NASA in the House, and yet senior agency and Administration officials have managed to surprise, frustrate and anger those of us who have been your greatest advocates. I thought it particularly troubling that senior people within the Administration and on your staff engaged in a campaign of telephone calls with reporters prior to the budget rollout to explain embargoed program details instead of providing briefings to this Committee. This is not a media campaign. NASA should be communicating with its policy and oversight committees. I encourage you to carry that message back to the Administrator's suite and to the Administration.

Mr. Chairman, I care deeply about NASA, and I want to ensure the safety of the crews we send into space. I want to ensure we can maintain and utilize the International Space Station. I want NASA to have clearly defined goals because I believe that is only way we will make any progress. NASA is a mission-driven organization that produces its best results with clearly defined goals and the resources to achieve them. I believe NASA's priorities are misplaced. With the retirement of the Space Shuttle and a plan to cancel the Constellation program, it is more important than ever that we work together to provide NASA with the legislative guidance it needs. I know you share many of my concerns. I look forward to working closely with you and I hope you will make room in our busy schedule to hold the necessary hearings to ensure we give NASA the guidance it needs.

