



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

For Immediate Release
January 17, 2018

Media Contacts: Thea McDonald, Brandon VerVelde
(202) 225-6371

Statement by Chairman Brian Babin (R-Texas)

An Update on NASA Commercial Crew Systems Development

Chairman Babin: The next few years will be busy for space exploration. NASA will be busy not only launching new systems, but they will be developing new business models, new contracting mechanisms and new ways of approaching every facet of the challenge of expanding “human presence beyond low-Earth orbit.”

Engaging with commercial partners to meet exploration needs is part of that broader effort. I am eager to see how we can partner with the private sector to advance NASA’s goals. NASA’s commercial crew program is part of that effort. As we assess the merits of this new approach, we must also recognize the hazards of such partnerships. Without diligent oversight by NASA and Congress, these programs could simply end up being corporate welfare and bad deals for the taxpayer.

This commercial crew program builds on the commercial cargo program and offers new insights about how government and industry can work together on key tasks. Perhaps even more importantly, this program is a key part of the bigger, broader effort to industrialize low-Earth orbit and transition the International Space Station (ISS) to a new operating model in the next decade.

But instead of looking forward and tackling the economic self-sufficiency and operation of the ISS, we are here today looking at not one, but two companies that are behind schedule, may not meet safety and reliability requirements and could even slip into cost overruns. Rather than being able to praise the success of a new approach to business, we are now confronted with the news that the certification won’t happen until at least 2019.

This situation gets even worse when we look at the safety and reliability concerns surrounding these two new systems. Both programs suffer from shared and individual issues concerning reliability and safety.

The risk that these companies cannot meet their deadlines or safety requirements increases the risk that the ISS cannot be successfully or gracefully transitioned in the middle of next decade. Increasing risks to ISS transition in turn, increase risk to human exploration programs in general. Further, they decrease the collective appetite for the

kind of innovative partnerships that will be vital to a host of future NASA exploration and science missions.

Both this hearing and last November's hearing on SLS and Orion get to matters of risk. What is the risk that NASA will be unable to meet its long-term goals of expanding permanent human presence beyond low-Earth orbit? Each program features cost, schedule and performance risks. Those programmatic risks translate into risks to the overall exploration architecture.

Both companies are making progress, but certainly not at the rate that was expected, and not without significant challenges to safety and reliability. In order to remedy these problems, NASA may seek additional funding or accept significant risks. Neither of those options is viable.

As I said at our recent hearing on SLS and Orion, NASA and the contractors have to execute.

I would like to thank our witnesses for their testimony and look forward to getting a better understanding of where we are and what our prospects look like going forward.

###