



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

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Statement by Chairman Brian Babin (R-Texas)

America's Human Presence in Low-Earth Orbit

Chairman Babin: The International Space Station (ISS) is the crown jewel of America's human spaceflight program.

As a representative for Johnson Space Center, I am proud of the leadership role Johnson has with the ISS and American human space exploration in general. I am keenly aware of the importance of the ISS to the hard-working professionals of Johnson Space Center. For them, the ISS is more than just a program of record, it is part of their being. This is why I take, with the utmost seriousness, the questions our committee must address on future of the ISS and America's human spaceflight program.

The Trump administration is a strong advocate for human space exploration and I support the administration's renewed focus. I agree, in broad terms, with the human exploration plans the administration has outlined. I appreciate the administration's invitation to discuss and mature plans for our civil space exploration program, including the ISS. However, we, as a Congress, have a responsibility to think through the issues on our own and reach our own conclusions, which is why we are here today.

I believe that doing exploration right means that anywhere we establish a human presence in space we must fulfill two main objectives. First, we must make that presence sustainable. Second, we must use that presence as a jumping off point to extend our reach even further.

This discussion, along with maintaining continuity of purpose, are key themes in the 2018 NASA Authorization Act, recently passed out of this committee on a bipartisan vote. Section 202 of the act, on the ISS transition, reflects a balance. It provides authority and guidance to the administration to carry out the initial steps of its ISS transition plan, but does so on a limited basis. It explicitly limits authorization to carry out the initial exploratory steps of the administration's plan to FY19.

Section 202 of the 2018 NASA Authorization Act is good policy that provides a strong foundation for Congress and the nation as we take our next steps with the ISS and America's future human presence in low-Earth orbit (LEO).

Four criteria that we may consider for evaluating success of an ISS transition:

First, the United States must preserve its global leadership in space and this means preserving our international partnerships as we continue onwards.

Second, our presence in LEO should support our journey to the moon and beyond.

Third, staying in LEO should not preclude further human exploration for economic or other reasons.

Fourth, as necessary to meet our national interests, we should maintain a regular American human presence—and whether public or private, whether permanent or periodic—in LEO.

I can tell you that “failure is not an option.” I can also tell you that there are not a lot of scenarios in which a few billion dollars per year can magically be added to NASA's human spaceflight program. Therefore, we have only one option: we must figure out how to lead and cooperate with our private and international partners to make human presence in LEO sustainable. With commitment, we can successfully transition the ISS while maintaining American leadership in human spaceflight.

In closing, I am proud that America has led and will continue to lead the human exploration of the cosmos. I will do everything in my power as chairman of the subcommittee to support NASA and American leadership in human space exploration. I thank the witnesses for their attendance and look forward to their testimony.

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