

Opening Statement
The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Ranking Member
Committee on Science and Technology
Mark-up of the
National Aeronautics and Space Administration Authorization Act of 2010
U.S. House of Representatives
July 22, 2010

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling this morning's markup of the NASA Authorization Act of 2010.

I want to begin by commending your leadership and that of Subcommittee Chairwoman Gabrielle Giffords and Ranking Subcommittee Member Pete Olson for the excellent oversight hearings conducted during this Congress on NASA's management and execution of its programs. We heard from an impressive array of industry, government and academic witnesses, and I want to especially note the compelling testimony we heard from former astronauts Neil Armstrong, Gene Cernan and Tom Stafford. These extraordinary men bring a lifetime of experience and wisdom to the debate, and I appreciate the time and effort they took to appear before our Committee.

The work of the Space Subcommittee and full Committee was aggressive and thorough, and helped all Members gain good insight into the agency's science, aeronautics, and human space flight programs.

The hearings and briefings also revealed that NASA was unable to provide convincing reasoning for its decision to cancel Constellation. In spite of repeated requests by this Committee, NASA failed to provide credible schedules, cost estimates, and a coherent rationale as to why it was necessary to wipe away \$10 billion in taxpayer investment in Constellation and to start anew with an ill-defined plan that risks taxpayer money on a commercial-only solution. NASA also failed to offer convincing evidence that its proposed \$6 billion investment in a commercial crew initiative would have any reasonable chance of succeeding, or even that careful thought had been given to basic assumptions about safety, marketability, liability, indemnification and intellectual property considerations.

Mr. Chairman, the bipartisan bill before us today directs NASA to build on key components of Constellation to ensure a robust human space exploration program. It emphasizes that NASA should rely on our investments in the Ares 1 and Orion launch systems to the maximum extent practicable, and that work should be phased to begin a gradual build-up of a heavy lift launch vehicle.

The bill also includes important policy provisions directing NASA to transition low-Earth orbit crew ferry flights to the commercial industry when it demonstrates the capability to NASA's satisfaction. Until that day, however, the least risky path to minimize our reliance on the Russians is to continue developing a low-Earth orbit launch system such as was envisioned by the Constellation program.

This bill before us takes the right approach for NASA's other important missions. It sustains a strong and vibrant space science program, enabling new missions to help scientists better understand the evolution of our solar system and universe. It provides funding for important aeronautics research designed to increase the capacity of our national airspace system, to make aircraft quieter, safer and more fuel efficient.

This bill also fully funds the Administration's request for NASA's Space Technology Program. This initiative is designed to revitalize NASA's long-term, high-risk research and development activities with the goal of enabling a broad set of new capabilities ranging from propulsion systems, materials, sensors, and other technologies we'll need to extend our reach into deep space.

Mr. Chairman, given that our members received a copy of the text just three days ago, I ask that we continue to work together between now and consideration on the House floor to improve the bill so that all of us can enthusiastically support it.

I also want to recognize the hard work done by your staff in crafting this bill and the bipartisan manner with which they have worked with our staff throughout the course of this Congress, with special kudos extended to Dick Obermann. He has been very open with us, and we appreciate all his efforts. I also want to thank Ken Monroe and Ed Feddeman on my staff for their excellent work and guidance throughout this process.

Given the budget constraints as well as the turmoil surrounding the direction of our human space flight program, it is vitally important that this good piece of legislation be enacted as soon as possible. I support this bill and I urge all Members to lend their support as well. It's important we get this legislation through Congress and to the President. Thank you.