

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**The Honorable Ralph Hall (R-TX), Chairman**  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
*A Review of NASA's Space Launch System*

July 12, 2011

Good morning. Today's hearing is entitled "A Review of NASA's Space Launch System", and our witness is NASA Administrator Charlie Bolden.

As a preface to the formal portion of my statement, I want to first congratulate all the men and women at NASA and its contractors for the successful launch of STS-135. The Shuttle launch was viewed by tens of thousands on hand in Florida and millions more around the world, including a packed crowd in this hearing room, and it was a bittersweet moment to watch the last flight of the Shuttle Atlantis lift off from Kennedy Space Center.

General, your team did an outstanding job, and we all look forward to welcoming the crew safely home next week.

Several weeks ago as our Committee began planning for this hearing, we had every expectation that NASA would have announced its Space Launch System architecture well before today, with the goal that Committee Members would have the opportunity to ask questions regarding cost, schedule, capabilities, and the like. Indications we had received from NASA throughout the spring clearly suggested that a decision would have been rendered prior to today. Sadly, such is not the case.

Nine months ago the President signed the NASA Authorization Act. Provisions in the bill clearly directed NASA to provide Congress with decisions on the selection of the crew vehicle and launch system designs by January 9, 2011. That date was considered attainable given the previous investment and substantial progress made by NASA in vehicle engineering, design, and demonstrations that had already been achieved by the Constellation program.

The Act also included the goal of reaching operational capability for the core elements not later than December 31, 2016 because that date seemed realistic for the now-canceled Constellation system, and it also reflects Congress' deep concern that we needed to have a back-up capability in place should commercial launch vehicles fail to materialize.

Instead, on January 15, Congress received a "Preliminary Report" that emphasized its selection of prototype vehicle designs, but did not commit the agency to their construction. The report was careful to note, and I quote: "NASA hopes to finalize its acquisition decisions as early as Spring of 2011 – details that will be included in a follow-on report to Congress." We are well into summer and no such report has been sent.

So today, six months later, and with the final space shuttle mission now underway, instead of an informed discussion on the attributes and trades on the selection of a Space Launch System, we'll be left with little more than an explanation of decision-making processes still to be completed.

Our letter of invitation asked you to describe the design of the launch system, how much it would cost, the budget profile, its performance, when it would be ready, and the types of missions it would enable. General Bolden, the fact that we do not have a final decision on the SLS and the supporting documents that the invitation letter requested represents an insult to Congress.

We will try our best throughout this hearing to accommodate the agency's failure and the failure of this White House to answer Congress and give us the information that we are entitled to have. But to be clear, this failure reflects poorly on the Administration and its space program. I can't help but feel that this Administration has let down the thousands of men and women who have devoted their careers to the space program as well as heroes such as Neil Armstrong, Mike Collins, Buzz Aldrin, Gene Cernan, Tom Stafford, and many, many others who risked their lives blazing the trail of space exploration. Some who lost their lives, and others who continue to maintain an unwavering dedication and devotion to the cause.

We have a record littered with requests by Congress for information over the last two years. We have waited for answers that have not come. We have pleaded for answers that have not come. We have done our best to be fair with you and this President, who set out to delay the next step in our nation's human space exploration program and by doing so has jeopardized the Space Station in the process.

It is a shame that for many of us that simply want to preserve, protect, and defend our leadership in space that we see NASA paying for rides to the Space Station from countries that may not have America's best interests at heart.

We have run out of patience. I realize that you are the person who has to bear the brunt of this President's bad decisions. This White House has done you wrong. But nonetheless, you must answer for these continued failures. I would like to point out today that this committee reserves the right to open an investigation into these continued delays and join the investigation initiated by the Senate. It's a shame we have to consider doing that.

Moving forward I think that it is important to note that we support all of the people engaged in developing the next heavy-lift vehicle as well as those working on the commercial cargo and crew contracts; people who are working every day to keep America at the forefront of human spaceflight. It is these engineers, technicians and scientists who, despite the absence of good leadership from this White House, strive to dream big and carry on the legacy of those that came before them.

I now recognize the Gentle-lady from Texas for her opening statement.