OPENING STATEMENT
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Ranking Member, U.S. House Committee on Science and Technology
NASA at 50: Past Accomplishments and Future Opportunities and Challenges
Wednesday, July 30, 2008
10:00 am
2318 Rayburn Office Building

Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to be here today celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Science and Technology Committee, and honoring the great achievements of the men and women of NASA over the past 50 years. NASA has given us so many great accomplishments, and so many great American heroes.

Today we are honored to have Senator John Glenn, a true American hero who has spent a lifetime serving his country, first as a Naval Aviator, then as the first American to orbit the Earth, and then serving 24 years as a U.S. Senator from Ohio. Senator Glenn, it's an honor to have you with us today.

I would also like to welcome the other distinguished Americans on our panel today; Norm Augustine, and Dr. Maria Zuber. Speaking of Norm Augustine, the American people should feel at ease if he would accept the second spot on the Presidential ticket. We will also hear pre-recorded testimony from noted physicist and author, Dr. Stephen Hawking. I also want to take a moment to welcome my good friends and former colleagues, Bob Walker and Sherry Boehlert, who along with Jim Sensenbrenner, have ably chaired this Committee in the past. I would also like to mention other Chairman I have worked with but who could not make it today; Don Fuqua, Robert Roe, and the late George Brown.

It is fitting to reflect on the accomplishments of both NASA, and the Science and Technology Committee over the last half century because they were born of the same crisis. In the decade after World War II, American leadership in science and technology was largely taken for granted. We may have allowed ourselves to get too complacent. When the Soviets launched Sputnik in October 1957, it was a real wake-up call for the country.

In 1958, under House Speaker Sam Rayburn, whose Texas fourth district I now represent, the Select Committee on Astronautics and Space Exploration was established. Shortly thereafter, the Committee created NASA from what was then the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics; and the permanent House Committee on Science and Astronautics – our forerunner – was chartered.

We rose to the challenge of Sputnik. We caught up with – and then surpassed – the Soviets. And in doing so we demonstrated to the world our American values of democracy and peaceful scientific achievements. But scientific and technological advantages tend to be short lived, and they rely on a steady stream of education and innovation that must be nurtured. While we celebrate and reflect on NASA's past accomplishments, it is also clear that future challenges and opportunities are no less daunting, no less important, and no less inspiring than those of the past 50 years.

NASA's aeronautical programs are vital to developing the next generation of aircraft and air traffic management systems that will help expand our economy through increased capacity with less frequent and less costly delays, and by developing technologies that will enable safer, and more efficient aircraft.

NASA's space science programs contribute to our knowledge of our solar system, the Sun, and the universe. Space science also has very practical applications, developing the means to monitor solar space weather events, which can disrupt the transmission of GPS signals and satellite communications and interfere with ground-based systems such as our electricity grid or military weapons targeting.

NASA's earth science programs have greatly advanced our understanding of our home planet. We are beginning to better understand the Earth, and the ways that weather, the oceans, land masses, ice caps, and the atmosphere interact with one another. Through NASA-developed technology, we're also improving our ability to predict weather, help farmers increase crop production, and give local governments the ability to better manage land-use, fisheries, and many other practical uses.

And in human space exploration, NASA is completing construction of the International Space Station. The ISS is the largest international engineering and construction project ever undertaken, and research on-board Station holds the promise of life-changing medical breakthroughs. We will pursue many of our future space exploration challenges with our international friends and allies, and those arrangements offer the potential for sustained peaceful cooperation in science and technology.

If America wants to retain its status in the world, and the prestige and power that comes from leadership, we can not be complacent. Other countries are making great strides, and American leadership is not guaranteed. We can succeed at whatever we put our minds to, as long as we stay focused.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to today's hearing. I look forward to celebrating some of our past successes. I also look forward to hearing from our panelists how we all can work together to ensure that the next 50 years are even better. I am proud to have been a part of the Science and Technology Committee for 27 years. Together we have accomplished amazing and revolutionary things, and I am confident our finest hour is ahead of us.