

**Opening Statement of  
The Honorable Ralph Hall, Ranking Republican Member  
Committee on Science and Technology Hearing on  
“NASA’s Fiscal Year 2009 Budget Request”  
February 13, 2008**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this morning’s hearing. And my thanks too, to NASA Administrator Mike Griffin, who is doing an absolutely superb job leading and managing the agency during this especially difficult time as NASA strives to complete the International Space Station, retire the Shuttle, and build a new, human-rated launch system.

The Fiscal Year 2009 NASA budget request continues to treat NASA favorably, especially when compared to other federal non-defense, discretionary programs. The FY09 request proposes to increase NASA’s funding by 1.8% compared to the last budget request, and the percentage is even higher when compared to the agency’s FY08 appropriations that was signed into law late last year.

Having said that, NASA is under enormous financial strain as it seeks to safely fly out Shuttle to its planned retirement in 2010, while concurrently paying for the design and construction of the new Constellation system and maintaining a balanced and robustly funded science and aeronautics research portfolio. There are many in this room – myself among them – and in the space and science community, who would argue that more money is needed, but the broader federal budget realities make that possibility difficult.

Given the current budget profile, I believe Administrator Griffin is making the right choices. And I also believe it is vitally important that NASA continues to keep the Constellation program on schedule to meet a 2015 launch date, if not sooner, and it is essential that we minimize, to the greatest degree possible, the amount of time that the U.S. goes without a manned space-launch capability. The prospect of being entirely reliant on our international partners for access to and from space is one that could have serious implications for America’s space supremacy.

Our country needs the Constellation system. It will offer many new capabilities, most notably the ability to go beyond low Earth orbit on long duration missions, and it will also be a much safer vehicle, providing its crews a far more reliable means of escape in the event of a launch mishap.

I understand the need for phasing out Shuttle to free up resources for development of Constellation. But Congress should be mindful that this budget request, and particularly the Constellation program budget, is very, very lean, with little margin to cover unanticipated cost increases. If there are surprises, either Congress will have to provide the resources to address them, or be prepared to accept a gap of greater than five years. So I urge NASA, industry, and Congress to work together to ensure we get back to space as soon as possible.

Equally important is the need to maintain a skilled workforce to support Constellation. We cannot afford to lose these people – such as we did between Apollo and Shuttle – and the longer the gap, the greater the risk that we won't be able to retain the talented pool of engineers and technicians who currently support Shuttle. I guarantee that if government's commitment to the Constellation program begins to waver, or if the gap extends and we can't provide meaningful jobs that have clear promise for a predictable and robust launch schedule, we will lose these folks to other industries. The cost of time and money to train replacements will be enormous.

Mr. Griffin, knowing that you have a complex assembly mission now underway, all of us greatly appreciate your willingness to take time out of your busy schedule to appear before this Committee. Thank you.

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