

OPENING STATEMENT

The Honorable Steven M. Palazzo (R-MS), Chairman

Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

NASA's Commercial Cargo Providers; Are They Ready to Supply the Space Station in the Post-Shuttle Era?

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I would like to welcome everyone to today's subcommittee hearing examining NASA's Commercial Cargo programs. I also want to thank our witnesses for taking time out of their busy schedules to testify before us today. We have a lot of ground to cover and I know Members want plenty of time to ask questions so I will keep my remarks short.

I think we are all well aware that NASA is preparing to launch the final Space Shuttle mission to the International Space Station. The cargo bay of Atlantis will be filled with supplies and spare parts bound for the International Space Station; enough to provide up to a year's margin of safety. The flight was added in part, because NASA and the commercial partners are behind schedule and have not yet demonstrated a capability to access the ISS. Without the shuttle, and until commercial cargo flights begin flying, NASA must rely on the capabilities of the international partners.

NASA's international partners should be commended for doing a fine job, but they simply do not have enough cargo carrying capacity by themselves to ensure that sufficient equipment is onboard the station to support a research team of six astronauts. NASA wrote the book on backup systems, and thankfully with STS-135, the space shuttle can be called upon one last time to provide the much needed cargo capability. But in the post-shuttle era will NASA's commercial cargo providers be able to do the job? Thus far, we have very little by which to make an informed judgment. Only one of the two cargo resupply contractors has actually orbited a prototype vehicle, and that was only an orbital demonstration that was not intended to reach the space station orbit.

Congress has generally been supportive of NASA's commercial cargo efforts, but too often requests for information have been met with a veil of secrecy and claims of company proprietary information. I want to remind NASA and the commercial partners that you are spending taxpayer money, and lots of it. So you will not be exempt from oversight and financial scrutiny.

I also want to remind everyone in this room that today we are talking about cargo, and not capabilities to take *astronauts* into space or to the ISS. Whether or not commercially developed, non-NASA launch systems can safely carry astronauts to orbit in an economical way is a question that will require some number of years before we have an answer, and will be the topic of a future hearing.

Today let's focus our attention on NASA's programs to commercially deliver cargo to the space station. NASA's commercial cargo programs have been in development for several years and have experienced delays. NASA has spent over \$1.25 Billion and is poised to spend more than \$4 billion over the next few years. Yet, in spite of optimistic projections, and even a successful SpaceX Falcon 9 launch and Dragon capsule recovery, NASA's commercial cargo partners have yet to demonstrate the ability to safely deliver cargo to the ISS.

I am hopeful that we will see some progress soon, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.