

**Opening Statement of
The Honorable Ralph M. Hall
The Science, Space, and Technology Committee Hearing
*Recent Developments in NASA's Commercial Crew Acquisition Strategy***

Friday, September 14, 2012

9:30 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Good morning, and welcome to today's hearing. Before we begin today, I want to take a moment to pay tribute to a true hero and a dear friend, Neil Armstrong, who was memorialized yesterday in a moving ceremony at the National Cathedral.

Neil Armstrong was an inspiration to all Americans, a recognized hero throughout the world – and yet one of the most humble and gracious men you ever met. On several occasions Neil appeared before this Committee to offer his wisdom and insight, deflecting praise and questions with grace and humility.

Neil's first step on the Moon established America's preeminence in space and paved the way for scores of spectacular missions involving hundreds of outstanding Astronauts. Neil was one of the most impassioned advocates for preserving America's leadership in space and constantly challenged us to strengthen human space exploration goals and missions. I urge my colleagues to join me in working to carry out his legacy. We will forever be inspired by his remarkable life and forever honor him for his place in American history.

I want to thank our witnesses for being with us today. I know a lot of time and effort goes into your preparation but your knowledge and experience is very important to us, so thank you for taking the time to appear today.

NASA recently awarded more than \$1.1 billion to three companies to develop competing concepts for human space transportation launch systems. Today's hearing will review NASA's rationale for selecting the three companies; consider the cost and safety implications of these recent decisions; and given the unique nature of Space Act Agreements, examine the level of NASA's insight and thus, its ability to evaluate technical and safety requirements.

Our nation has made great strides in space exploration. But those strides have not come without cost and sacrifice. We have lost astronauts. After the Columbia accident President Bush and Congress put our nation on a path to develop new human space transportation systems that were designed from inception to

be safer than the Space Shuttle. NASA responded with the Constellation system. But this Administration has chosen a different path. NASA now seeks to use government funds to stimulate aerospace companies to develop multiple, competing human spaceflight systems – systems for which NASA may be the only customer. Are these systems designed from inception to be safer than the space shuttle, or is NASA responding to different goals? How and when will we know the safety of these new systems?

NASA is using Space Act Agreements – not regular contracts – giving the companies great flexibility to do as *they* see fit. In fact so much flexibility that during this phase no NASA crew transportation system requirements can be levied. It's hard for me to understand why NASA is proceeding this way. Will this result in systems that are safe for our American and international partner astronauts? How will NASA know if they don't have the insight? And perhaps more importantly to those of us in Congress who are asked to fund this, how and when will NASA know if it is getting what it needs and if these systems will be safe enough. Redesigns will be costly and time consuming if important technical or safety requirements were not addressed up front.

If our nation is going to ask crews to explore space, it is our responsibility to do everything possible to ensure that those astronauts return to Earth safely. I'm not convinced this approach is the right one but I'm willing to listen.