

Opening Statement
The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Chairman
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
The National Aeronautics and Space Administration Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request

Wednesday, March 2, 2011

I want to thank Administrator Bolden for appearing before our Committee today. There are a number of significant issues facing our nation's space program, and I look forward to a frank and open discussion on the issues.

I am concerned that the future of our space program is in serious jeopardy. With the retirement of the Space Shuttle, NASA faces a critical period and needs to focus its limited resources to sustain our leadership in space.

As everyone knows we are in a challenging budget environment. In times like these it is more important than ever for NASA to have credible, realistic plans that can be understood and defended. It must execute the programs it has with efficiency and thrift, and work closely with the Congress to abide by legislation.

In the area of human spaceflight, I am concerned about having assured access to the International Space Station for the U.S. and our international partners so it can live up to its promise as vital research laboratory. That is why Congress, several years ago, authorized a follow-on system called Constellation. The Constellation program was guided by the safety recommendations of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board. Its goals and design were well understood and endorsed by successive Republican and Democratic Congresses.

Yet last year the Administration, without warning, cancelled Constellation in favor of a commercial crew proposal that assumed spending at least \$6 billion over five years on the development and demonstration of up to 3 or 4 privately owned and operated commercial crew systems.

Despite repeated requests from former Chairman Gordon and myself, NASA never provided the basis for its cost estimates or a credible plan showing how the needs of the U.S. and our international partners could be met at a lower cost or on a faster development cycle than Constellation.

So last year, after intense and often contentious debate Congress passed the NASA Authorization Act of 2010. The bill was a product of compromise, and no one got everything they wanted. But the Act contained policy elements and funding guidelines that could allow the space program to move forward.

Specifically the Act provided \$10.8 billion over three years for the newly-designated Multi Purpose Crew Vehicle and Space Launch System to assure the capability to supply and support the International Space Station for the U.S. and our international partners in case commercial proposals fail to materialize.

The Act also urged NASA to capitalize on investments already made in the Constellation programs in order to save money, maintain a skilled workforce, and minimize further development delays.

With regard to Commercial Crew, the Act authorized \$1.3 billion over three years for activities that “reduce risk, develop technologies, and lead to advancements that will help determine the most effective and efficient means of advancing the development of commercial crew services.”

Commercial crew was not ignored, but to be perfectly clear, it was not – and is not – Congress’ first priority.

Yet the Administration’s FY2012 budget proposal completely flips the priorities of the Act, significantly increasing Commercial Crew funding while making deep cuts to the Human Exploration Capabilities accounts which Congress clearly intended to serve as our assured access to space.

Members of this Committee have been some of NASA’s most ardent supporters in the House and we take the NASA Authorization Act very seriously. We expect NASA to make good faith efforts to abide by the policy direction and funding limitations in the law, and to cease its efforts to delay resumption of full development of an assured access system

Knowing that we face a very difficult budget environment for years to come, it is more important than ever that NASA have credible plans, execute them well, and work closely with Congress to abide by legislative direction.

We want to work together with you to maintain our human spaceflight program.

In order to do this, NASA should embrace the policy direction that has been agreed to, which would help reduce the surprise, frustration and anger from those who have been your greatest supporters.

I now recognize Ms. Johnson for her opening remarks.