



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

The Space Leadership Preservation Act and the Need for Stability at NASA

Chairman Smith: Presidential transitions often have provided a challenge to NASA programs that require continuity and budget stability. But few have been as rocky as the administration change we experienced seven years ago.

Even before he was elected president, then-candidate Barack Obama planned to delay the Constellation program being built to take humans to deep space destinations. One of the Obama administration's first acts, in fact, was to cancel this NASA program outright.

These jarring decisions have been accompanied by repeated budget proposals that continue to cut key programs designed to take humans to deep space destinations like the Moon and Mars.

The most recent proposal released just a few weeks ago would shrink the Space Launch System and Orion crew vehicle by more than \$800 million. Even worse, the entire budget depends on make-believe budget gimmicks.

This regrettable approach continues to make a Mars mission all but impossible. It is not the approach of an administration that is serious about maintaining America's leadership in space.

The recent report from the National Academies of Science titled "Pathways to Exploration: Rationales and Approaches for a U.S. Program of Human Space Exploration," stated that:

"...the human spaceflight program in the United States had experienced considerable programmatic turbulence, with frequent and dramatic changes in program goals and mission plans in response to changes in national policies. The changes had a high cost in program resources and opportunities and imposed what many feared was an intolerable burden on already constrained human exploration budgets."

The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP), an advisory body established by Congress to report to NASA and Congress on safety issues that affect NASA, stated in their recent report in January that,

"NASA faces another challenge that has historically led to disruption and inefficiency and arguably has impact on safety and good systems engineering. This is the challenge of starting over with new programs and directions following administration change. As in prior reports, the ASAP urges constancy of purpose. Failing to stay the course with current programs of record will make it an even longer, costlier, and potentially less safe trip to Mars."

These facts are not lost on this Committee. The most recent NASA Authorization Act from 2010 contains several provisions that remain the "law of the land" and continue to guide NASA activities:

- The Act notes that the "commitment to human exploration goals is essential for providing the necessary long-term focus and programmatic consistency and robustness of the United States civilian space program."
- The Act states that "it is in the United States national interest to maintain a government operated space transportation system for crew and cargo delivery to space."
- The Act directs that "the United States must develop as rapidly as possible replacement vehicles capable of providing both human and cargo launch capability to low-Earth orbit and to destinations beyond low-Earth orbit."

The 2005, 2008 and 2010 NASA Authorization Acts are consistent in their direction to NASA. NASA needs the same certainty from the Executive Branch that it receives from Congress.

Today we are discussing how to provide that stability to NASA once again as we look toward a presidential transition in less than a year.

My friend and Texas colleague, Rep. John Culberson, has a bill that seeks to do just that.

I thank Rep. Culberson for his leadership on this issue and I am a cosponsor of his legislation.

We share the goal of providing NASA with long-term consistent support. It is great to have him here today to discuss his bill.

One of the first hearings that this Committee held during my chairmanship was, in fact, on this very topic.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today how we can ensure stability in our space program through the next presidential transition.

Dr. Michael Griffin provides a unique perspective as the last NASA Administrator to serve before a presidential transition.

Col. Eileen Collins not only has served as a pilot and commander of space shuttle missions, but also as a member of the NASA Advisory Council during the last transition.

And Ms. Cristina Chaplain brings the Government Accountability Office's insightful perspective.

We look forward to hearing their testimony and learning how we can ensure that NASA remains on the forefront of space exploration through the next presidential transition.

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