

**Opening Statement of the
Honorable Ralph Hall, Ranking Member
Committee on Science and Technology
Hearing
“Aviation Safety: Can NASA Do More to Protect the Public?”**

Wednesday, October 31, 2007

Mr. Chairman, today’s hearing on NASA’s *National Aviation Operations Monitoring Service* (NOAMS) is timely, especially considering the amount of scrutiny this program has received in the press. Several issues have arisen that bring into question the manner in which NASA closed out NAOMS, whether it achieved its original goals, and the agency’s refusal to provide raw survey data to the press in response to a Freedom of Information Act request. I am optimistic that, by the hearing’s conclusion, we’ll all have a clear understanding regarding these and other pressing issues.

I do want to associate myself with NASA Administrator Mike Griffin’s public statement that lays out the agency’s philosophy on the treatment of research data. Like him, I believe NASA ought to be in the business of putting information in front of the public, not withholding it. That being said every care should be taken to protect the identities of survey respondents. NAOMS promised pilots complete confidentiality to ensure their candid participation, and that ought not be breached. If information is disclosed that may allow respondents to be identified, there will be a serious chilling effect in future survey efforts funded by the federal government, whether we’re talking about pilots or other citizen groups who provide our government meaningful insight into a whole host of activities. In the case of NAOMS, we should be cognizant of striking a balance between transparency and confidentiality.

NASA should release the survey data, but to help all of us gain a better understanding of what it is telling us, they should also provide information, whether in the form of analysis, methodology, or reports, to give us a clear sense of context. It’s also important that the data be scrubbed to ensure errors are eliminated.

I want to thank our witnesses for taking time from their busy schedules to appear before us this afternoon, and acknowledge their hard work and preparation. All of us appreciate your willingness to be here.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.