U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics:
A Review of NASA's Plans for the International Space Station and Future Low Earth Orbit
Wednesday, July 10, 2019

Thank you, Chairwoman Horn, for holding this hearing to consider NASA's plans for the International Space Station and future activities in low Earth orbit.

As I have noted in the past, the International Space Station is the largest and most complex science and engineering project ever carried out in space. It plays a critical role in carrying out the human health and technological research that is essential if we are to successfully send our astronauts to Mars and back. The ISS also serves as a laboratory for fundamental and applied science as well as an observation platform for astronomical, environmental, and heliophysics research. It has been an enduring example of international cooperation in space, and it continues to inspire our young people to excel and to provide opportunities for classrooms across our nation to interact with our astronauts through live communication downlinks.

Yet the ISS is a limited resource with a limited lifetime, and we need to make sure that we make the best use of it while we have it. And to me, that means making sure that its highest priority is carrying out the research and engineering testbed activities that can only be done on the ISS. That is the lens through which I will be looking at NASA's proposals for ISS commercial activities. I support efforts to create a vibrant commercial space economy in low Earth orbit, but ultimately it is the private sector that will determine whether or not that happens. Private investment will be needed, not government subsidies, if LEO commercialization is to be sustainable over the long term. And I think that the jury is still out as to whether that will happen.

In the meantime, the International Space Station has a limited lifetime, limited crew size, and limited research capabilities. As I said earlier, we need to ensure that those resources are focused on those tasks that can only be done on the ISS and that are of highest priority. As a result, I will be taking a close look at NASA's proposed commercialization initiative to see whether it meets that standard. At this point, I am not convinced it does. For example, I am skeptical that sending wealthy space tourists to the ISS is the best—or even a good—use of that taxpayer-funded facility. NASA keeps saying there are unanswered human health research questions that can only be addressed on the ISS, questions that need to be answered if we are to reduce the risks of

sending humans to Mars. If that is the case, our focus should be on sending additional crew members or researchers to the Station, not well heeled individuals seeking an exotic vacation.

Well, we have much to discuss today, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses. Thank you, and I yield back.