



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics Hearing:
*NASA's Future in Low Earth Orbit: Considerations for International Space Station
Extension and Transition*

September 21, 2021

Good morning, and thank you Chairman Beyer for holding this important hearing on the International Space Station and NASA's future in low Earth orbit.

I want to welcome our distinguished witnesses today, and thank you for participating. I also want to thank you for your service. We wouldn't be discussing the International Space Station, its accomplishments, and the plans for its future without your important contributions and those of so many others.

I am proud of what NASA and our partners have accomplished with the International Space Station. It has supported humans on orbit for two decades – a considerable achievement. It also continues to enable an array of research and technology development that advances basic science and our preparations for sending humans the Moon and Mars.

I also want to echo Chairman Beyer's comments on the importance of the Space Station to our U.S. leadership in bringing nations together in pursuit of the peaceful use and exploration of outer space. The enduring mission of peaceful space cooperation is more important now than ever.

While planning for a future beyond the Space Station is important, the reality is that the International Space Station is still operating.

And important work remains to be done, including research on human health and performance in space, fundamental microgravity science, life support systems for deep space exploration, and next generation space suit development and testing.

I certainly hope that these activities, as well as other research, are NASA's priorities. Because part of our congressional role is to consider how long the Space Station should operate.

And while novelties such as private space tourist missions or movie-making on the International Space Station may grab media attention, they don't establish the case for extending this unique, one-of-a-kind orbiting laboratory.

And as we look beyond the International Space Station, we need NASA to provide a clear accounting of what its specific requirements will be for low Earth orbit human spaceflight activities, so that NASA can focus its limited resources on ensuring those requirements are met.

In addition, as we look ahead to NASA's future in low Earth orbit, I hope that we also continue to maintain a focus on STEM engagement and inspiring our youth. America's future depends on a 21st-century workforce that can continue our science and innovation capabilities, including in space.

Mr. Chairman, there's much to discuss at today's hearing, including the structural health of the Space Station, NASA's plans and cost estimates for what follows, and the need for a clear understanding of what NASA's requirements for low Earth orbit activities will be once the International Space Station has been retired.

Finally, given the important geopolitical role that the International Space Station has played, we need to examine how best we can ensure that the U.S. can continue to maintain the international partnerships that the ISS has fostered.

With that, I look forward to our witness's testimonies, and I yield back.

Thank you.