

OPENING STATEMENT
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House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Space
“An Update on NASA Commercial Crew Systems Development”
January 17, 2018

Good morning, and welcome to our witnesses. Since the last Space Shuttle flight in 2011, the U.S. has lacked a domestic human spaceflight capability and has relied on Russian crew transportation services to transport NASA crew to and from the International Space Station. That arrangement has proved to be very durable in spite of geopolitical tensions back here on Earth. However, it is no substitute for a U.S. crew transfer capability. This morning’s hearing will provide us with update on the status of NASA’s and industry’s efforts to reestablish a domestic capability for launching our astronauts to the ISS.

NASA’s two Commercial Crew Program providers, Boeing and SpaceX, are working towards the goal of conducting test flights, first without crew onboard and later with crew. If these flight tests are successful, the current schedule would have NASA certify the two systems for operational missions sometime in 2019. As we have discussed on numerous occasions in this Subcommittee, getting to this stage of the Commercial Crew Program has not been easy. Our witnesses from the Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) will no doubt attest to that point. And the upcoming end to the availability of Soyuz seats adds the risk of unhealthy schedule pressure to the other challenges facing the program.

Yet, despite the prospect of our access to seats on the Soyuz coming to an end next year, NASA and the two companies cannot afford to cut corners in attempting to prevent a potential gap in U.S. access to the ISS. Because, Mr. Chairman, if it is to be sustainable, the end result of the Commercial Crew program must be a safe commercial crew transportation system for our astronauts. Next week NASA will commemorate the astronauts who died in the *Columbia*, *Challenger*, and *Apollo I* accidents, as well as other NASA pilots and employees who lost their lives in the pursuit of space exploration. We cannot forget their sacrifices, even as we blaze new trails into space.

As the NASA Transition Authorization Act of 2017 states: “*consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board, the Administration shall ensure that safety and the minimization of the probability of loss of crew are the critical priorities of the Commercial Crew Program*”. I hope that we will have a robust discussion at today’s hearing on how NASA and its providers will ensure that planned commercial crew transportation systems are safe enough for our astronauts to fly in, what the challenges are to achieving that level of safety, and what safeguards the ASAP and GAO would recommend.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses, and I yield back.