

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
U.S. Congressman Jerry Costello
Acting Ranking Member

*NASA's Commercial Cargo Providers:
Are They Ready to Supply the Space Station in the Post-Shuttle Era?*

Thursday, May 26, 2011
10:00 AM to 12:00 PM
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

- Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today's hearing to receive testimony on the readiness of commercial cargo providers to service the International Space Station (ISS) after the Space Shuttle retires this year.

- First, I want to congratulate Bill Gerstenmaier and the entire NASA team for the successful launch of STS-134, Space Shuttle Endeavour's final mission. We were all heartened that Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was present at the launch, and our thoughts are with the astronauts and their families for their safe return home.

- In 2006, NASA envisioned a commercial cargo program that took into account the financial and programmatic risk to the U.S. government

allowing the private companies to service the ISS. The initial plan 1) allowed NASA to partner with a commercial provider to develop and demonstrate a safe cargo mission to the ISS before signing a long-term resupply contract and 2) provided a contingency plan to use Constellation vehicles and rockets if commercial providers could not meet their goals.

- In the last five years, the landscape of human spaceflight has changed. In 2008, NASA signed long-term resupply contracts with SpaceX and Orbital before either company had safely completed a commercial cargo mission, and in 2010 NASA canceled the Constellation program and shifted its focus to deep space exploration. Under this new plan, commercial providers will be fully responsible for the critical task of servicing the ISS when the Space Shuttle retires this year.

- Orbital and SpaceX have made significant strides in achieving the goals laid out by NASA for providing commercial cargo services under their

initial agreements, but to date neither company has successfully completed a mission to and from the ISS. However, both companies are under contract with NASA to begin flying cargo missions in 2012.

- After the final Space Shuttle launch will bring supplies to the station this summer, NASA has no back-up plan if Orbital and SpaceX are not ready to launch in 2012. Without a robust and reliable commercial cargo service, NASA will not realize its plans to fully utilize the ISS as a research and development facility.
- As Chair of this Subcommittee, Congresswoman Giffords expressed these concerns about commercial providers. She strongly believed commercial companies should be given the time to demonstrate they could safely provide cargo services but felt NASA could not put the ISS or deep space exploration at risk by not providing a back-up plan if they fail.

- I hope to hear today how NASA, Congress, and commercial providers can work together to identify any remaining risks to reliable and timely commercial cargo operations, develop realistic expectations for the program, and ensure NASA has executable contingency options if commercial services are unavailable. We must ensure NASA has sustainable commercial cargo services for the life of the ISS without exposing the U.S. government to too much financial and programmatic risk.

- I welcome our panel of witnesses and look forward to their testimony. I yield back the balance of my time