

OPENING STATEMENT

HON. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON [D-TX]

September 12, 2012

Good morning, and welcome to our witnesses. I look forward to your testimony.

Mr. Chairman, I will be brief in my remarks. Today's hearing is important for a number of reasons. In a season that seems to be consumed by partisan rhetoric and campaign slogans, I am glad that Members will instead have a chance this morning to focus on the serious work being done by a dedicated NASA and industry team to bring the future of our nation's human space exploration program into being.

As you know, successive Congresses and Administrations have said that it is time to again move humanity beyond low Earth orbit and continue the voyages of exploration begun by Neil Armstrong and his fellow astronauts. And we will pay tribute tomorrow at the National Cathedral to Mr. Armstrong, a man who spoke eloquently about the importance of a national program of human exploration when he testified before our Committee.

Yet, as I have said before, I think the most fitting tribute we can give to Mr. Armstrong's memory is not a eulogy, but instead a real commitment to the spirit of exploration that he embodied. And that's one of the reasons today's hearing is so important.

It is easy for us to talk of returning to the Moon or going to an asteroid, or visiting Mars long after most of us will be gone from our positions in Congress and the White House. It is another thing for us to actually sustain the needed investments and provide the programmatic stability that will help turn those words into reality. Yet if we fail to do so, the consequences of our failure will be long lasting.

Based on the testimony we will hear today, it is clear that NASA and its contractor team have made significant progress under very challenging conditions. They are turning designs and concepts into hardware and software and are moving forward towards flight tests in spite of funding that has been significantly less than authorized.

However, they can't do it alone. We—Congress and the White House—can set them up for failure if we disrupt their funding and programmatic plans in the name of short-term cost savings or if we allow the funding that Congress provides for these programs to be reallocated or otherwise restricted within NASA during the upcoming Continuing Resolution. We will need to guard against both dangers in the coming months.

Finally, while I am pleased that the Space Launch System and the Orion crew capsule appear to be progressing well given the level of funding that has been available to them, we also need NASA to lay out the plans for the use of these vehicles. SLS and Orion are simply the *means* to achieving the ends we are seeking in our human exploration program, and not ends in themselves. As NASA continues work on the

development of these vehicles, it is not too soon for NASA to start clearly defining the steps it plans to take to achieve the broad exploration goals laid out by Congress in successive NASA Authorization Acts.

That, however, is the topic for a future hearing. Today we will hear about the status of the SLS and Orion vehicles that will make those exploration missions possible. My thanks again to our witnesses for their participation in this morning's hearing, and I yield back the balance of my time.