

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**RANKING MEMBER EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON [D-TX]**  
**September 22, 2011**

Good morning. I want to join Chairman Hall in welcoming our witnesses. Each of you brings a unique blend of expertise and accomplishments to today's hearing, and I look forward to your testimony. I would also like to take a moment to express my appreciation to Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Cernan for their continued service to this nation. Their past service as astronauts, including commanding Apollo Moon-landing missions, is well known; what is not so well known is their willingness to *continue* to serve this country, traveling to war zones and to nations around the world as good-will ambassadors for America, when they could be at home enjoying well earned retirements.

It shows the type of individuals they are. However, it also demonstrates that America's human space flight program has always been about much more than simply building rockets and space capsules and launching astronauts into space. It is also about inspiring people—both young and old; it is about providing a peaceful and positive demonstration to nations around the world of American technological preeminence; it is about developing cutting edge technologies for our human space missions that also benefit our citizens and create new jobs; it is about motivating our young people to pursue careers in science and engineering by providing them with the challenging future that is inherent to space exploration; and it is about advancing our knowledge.

That is something I think we in Congress need to remember as we debate what we want to do with our nation's human space flight program. We sometimes forget that the American people are much less interested in *what* particular rocket NASA will be building than in *why* we are investing in space exploration in the first place.

As I have already indicated, I think that the benefits of investing in human space flight are clear and compelling, and ones that can justify making a sustained commitment to moving forward on our next steps in exploration. Because that is what we *should* be talking about—determining how much we are willing to commit on an annual basis to maintain a credible and forward-looking human space flight and exploration program—and not continually revisiting the question of whether we should have one at all. Successive Congresses and Presidents from both parties have already answered that question in the affirmative—it's now time to move on.

That said, I know that there will be some who will say: "The space race is over, we won it more than forty years ago, and supporters of human space exploration are just captive to nostalgia." Well, I was proud of what this country accomplished in the Apollo program, but I'm not nostalgic for that time. Instead, I support space exploration because it is about the future, not the past.

And I firmly believe we are in a new, equally demanding "space race"—a race to inspire our young people to acquire the science and engineering skills they will need to compete for the jobs of the future; a race to develop the technologies that will not only help us explore space but also strengthen our economy and improve our quality of life back here on Earth; and a race to maintain our leadership as a spacefaring nation in the face of growing competitive challenges by other nations.

There will also be those who will say: "It's time to get the government out of space exploration—let the private sector do it." Such a statement ignores the fact that our human space flight program—and NASA in total—represents one of the most effective public-private partnerships in pursuit of challenging goals that this country has ever seen. The facts are clear—almost 85% of NASA's budget *already* goes to the private sector to provide the hardware, software, intellectual energy, and services that help NASA push back the space frontier.

And of course there are those who say that we should pause our human space flight program until we have a clear exploration policy, so that NASA doesn't wind up building a "rocket to nowhere." As the Ranking Member of this authorizing committee, I would only note that three successive NASA Authorizations have directed NASA to pursue a step-by-step program of exploration beyond low Earth orbit. So whether it's called "step-by-step" or a "flexible path" exploration program, it's clear that Congress and the President have already given the necessary policy direction. The technical experts at NASA now need to be allowed to get on with the task of developing the specific steps on that path that make the most sense.

Finally, there will be those who say: "Times are tough. We can't afford it right now." I would respond that we can't afford *not* to pursue a meaningful human space flight program. The amount of funding that would be cut will have no significant positive impact on our fiscal situation, but it will result in the loss of tens of thousands of good-paying, skilled jobs in the aerospace sector; will slow the development of advanced technologies that could wind up creating new jobs in the future; will forfeit American leadership in space; and will inevitably lead some of our best and brightest young minds to turn away from studying science and engineering. I don't think that makes sense, and I don't think most Americans will either if presented with the facts.

Mr. Chairman, I have shared your frustration at the slow pace with which NASA has been allowed to move on with the human space flight program authorized and funded by Congress. I would note that sixteen months ago, this Committee held a similar hearing with Mr. Armstrong and Capt. Cernan. At that time, Congresswoman Giffords, who was then Chairwoman of the Space and Aeronautics subcommittee, voiced her concerns about the viability of the Administration's plans for NASA. Like our witnesses today, she stressed the need for a clear vision, a commitment to consistent, achievable goals, and budgets that are adequate for the tasks to be undertaken.

Many of the issues raised by Congresswoman Giffords in the last Congress are still relevant as we look at this year's budget request for NASA. That said, I believe that the President's announcement last week was a very positive step, and I look forward to working with Members of Congress and the President to help ensure that the nation can sustain a human space flight program it can be proud of for decades to come.

Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.