

**Statement of**  
**Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson**  
**Committee on Science, Space & Technology**  
*“The Future of NASA: Perspectives on Strategic Vision for America’s Space Program”*  
**December 12, 2012**

Good morning. I want to join Chairman Hall in welcoming our witnesses. And in particular, I want to welcome former Chairman Walker back to the Committee. I look forward to each of your testimonies.

Today’s hearing is an important one for the Committee, because NASA is a critical part of the Nation’s research and development enterprise, as well as being a source of inspiration for our young people and a worldwide symbol of American technological prowess, leadership, and good will. We want NASA to succeed in its endeavors, because its success benefits our nation in so many ways.

In establishing NASA through the Space Act of 1958, Congress directed the agency to “*contribute materially*” to “*The preservation of the role of the United States as a leader in aeronautical and space science and technology and in the application thereof to the conduct of peaceful activities within and outside the atmosphere*”.

Successive NASA Authorization Acts over the years have stressed the need for a balanced program of science, aeronautics, technological research, and human space flight and exploration. The result has been that this balanced program has driven advances that have enhanced knowledge, promoted innovation and economic vitality, inspired our youth, and deepened our understanding of the Earth and its environment.

However, in recent years NASA’s ability to carry out its missions has been eroded. In that regard, it’s estimated that NASA’s purchasing power has actually decreased by about 18 % in constant dollars from FY 1992 to FY 2012 *in spite of* the agency being given a number of major initiatives to carry out over that same period. In fact, last year’s appropriated budget was about \$1 billion less than in FY 2010. The cumulative impact of this budgetary instability has been felt by all of NASA’s programs and its institutional infrastructure, a problem also highlighted by NASA’s Inspector General in a recent report. And we will hear similar concerns raised by the National Research Council witness today, as he discusses his panel’s recently released report.

Ironically, the issues considered by the NRC panel are not new to the Committee. We have heard them raised in one form or another in both this and previous Congresses. I hope that the findings of the NRC panel's assessment will encourage both the Administration and Congress to put NASA on a firmer footing and to recognize NASA for the national asset that it is.

While NASA's programs are funded as part of the Federal domestic discretionary budget, we should not forget that those programs are long-term R&D undertakings, and they can't just be turned on and off whenever we have a short-term fiscal issue needing attention—not if we want them to be successful, and not if we want to maintain our commitment to the dedicated workforce that is trying to bring them to fruition. That is a challenge we are going to face in the coming months and years as we work to put the nation's financial house in order. Because we forget at our peril the hard reality that investments in R&D and innovation, such as in the programs and projects carried out at NASA are just that—*investments*—investments in our nation's future and in the future of our children.

It may only be in retrospect that we will learn the true costs of walking away from investments in R&D agencies such as NASA—but I firmly believe that those costs will be high and long-lasting if we go down such a destructive path. I hope we don't do so, because other nations increasingly recognize the benefits that a strong and active space program can deliver, and as a result we see them being willing to make the necessary investments to build their capabilities.

Mr. Chairman, our leadership and preeminence in space and aeronautics are at stake. Our children's future jobs and long-term global competitiveness are at stake. Resting on our laurels from prior accomplishments is not an option, whether in science, aeronautics, or human exploration.

That is not to say that we shouldn't do all we can to encourage efficiencies in NASA's programs and infrastructure and eliminate waste wherever we find it. But all of those efficiencies will be for naught if we do not also recognize that sustained investments in research, technology, and development must also be made if NASA is to succeed.

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude my remarks, allow me to take a moment to thank Mr. Costello, Ms. Woolsey, Mr. Miller, and Mr. Clarke for their service to our nation. Each of them will be departing the House of Representatives at the completion of the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, and I want to wish them well. They have been thoughtful and hardworking Members of our Committee caucus, and I shall miss them.