

Statement for the Record

Hon. Eddie Bernice Johnson [D-TX]

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“An Overview of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Budget for Fiscal Year 2014”

April 24, 2013

Good afternoon. I want to welcome NASA Administrator Bolden back to the Committee, and I look forward to his testimony regarding NASA’s Fiscal Year 2014 budget request.

As you know, last week, the full Science, Space, and Technology Committee heard from Dr. John Holdren, the President’s Science Advisor and Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy. He described the President’s budget request for R&D as one that recognizes the *“profound importance of continued progress in science and technology even as we work to reduce budget deficits and hold the line on government spending.”* I could not agree more. A commitment to deficit reduction should not negate the need to invest in our future.

And I consider NASA and its programs to be one of the most strategic of the investments we can make as a nation. Not only is NASA an engine of innovation for America, but it has an additional feature that sets it apart from much of the rest of the federal R&D enterprise—namely, its ability to inspire. That quality of inspiration not only sets NASA apart, but it has also helped to make NASA one of the most positive symbols of our nation, recognizable throughout the world.

We need that inspiration, now more than ever, as we seek to encourage our young people to pursue careers in science and engineering. Because it is that inspiration that breathes life into STEM education initiatives and helps the STEM curricula motivate a diverse cross-section of our youth, including those who have traditionally been under-represented in the STEM fields. That is one of the reasons I told Dr. Holdren that I need to know more about the Administration’s proposed reorganization of federal STEM programs before I can make an informed assessment of the proposed changes. NASA’s STEM initiatives and educational outreach, particularly through its science missions, have long been able to excite our young people, and I don’t want to lose that excitement.

Ultimately, though, it is the challenging work that NASA undertakes that makes it such a crown jewel of our nation’s R&D enterprise. Yet, as a recent report by the National Academies makes clear, *“NASA cannot execute a robust, balanced aeronautics and space program given the current budget constraints.”* That finding should not be a surprise to anyone who has been on this Committee for more than a few years. We—successive Administrations and Congresses alike—have asked NASA to carry out many important tasks, but too often we have allowed short-term fiscal pressures to overrule the strategic imperative to invest in NASA at levels that are commensurate with those tasks.

I hope as we prepare to reauthorize NASA this year, that we see investing in NASA not as a discretionary luxury, but rather as what it is—a critical investment in the future well-being of this nation and a beacon of inspiration for the generation that will be coming along to create the jobs of the future, explore the unknown, and improve the quality of life back here on Earth.