

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

Ranking Member Donna F. Edwards (D-MD) of the Space  
Subcommittee

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
Subcommittee on Space

*“AN OVERVIEW OF THE BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE  
ADMINISTRATION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017”*

March 17, 2016

Chairman Babin, thank you for calling this hearing to examine the Fiscal Year 2017 budget request for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration--NASA.

I'd like to start by joining you in welcoming a friend, an inspiring leader, and an exemplar of public service, Administrator Charlie Bolden. Thank you, General Bolden, for your service to our Nation. We are fortunate to have you at the helm of our nation's space agency.

Mr. Chairman, our space program is a shining example of what we can accomplish as a nation when we harness the talents of our workforce and the capabilities of our industry, academia, and international partners.

The Fiscal Year 2017 budget request for NASA is \$19 billion--a 1.3 percent reduction from the enacted appropriation for Fiscal Year 2016. While this proposal is good starting point for this morning's discussion, I hope that we can at least get to the \$19.3 billion level that Congress appropriated for NASA in Fiscal Year 2016.

I am pleased that the request proposes to revitalize our nation's aeronautics research activities with an exciting initiative to use "X-Planes" to demonstrate technologies leading to cleaner, quieter, and more efficient aircraft. Demonstrating and applying advanced technologies is important to maintaining our competitive edge and sustaining the significant economic benefits that commercial aviation provides.

And, I'm heartened that the request proposes increases above the levels provided in the FY 2016 appropriations for the Safety, Security, and Mission Services account which, among other things, provides the funding to operate NASA's field centers, including the Goddard Space Flight Center in Maryland.

I am also pleased that the request would sustain a robust Science program composed of research and data analysis grants and small, medium, and large missions, including development of high-priority missions such as the James Webb Space Telescope, the Wide-field Infrared Survey Telescope, the Europa Clipper, the Mars 2020 rover, and the Solar Probe Plus missions.

NASA's science programs are furthering our knowledge of our home planet and opening new windows into our universe. And, if humanity is to one day extend its presence beyond Earth, we will need the scientific understanding to do so.

We will also need to take a series of steps along a pathway involving technology development, demonstration of operational capabilities, and development and testing of exploration systems to make that move.

While NASA has developed a *Journey to Mars* strategy that provides an initial outline of a pathway to Mars, we need a baseline roadmap and structure to support such a multidecadal endeavor. Such a roadmap would help put in sharper focus the impacts that the proposed reductions to the Space Launch System (SLS) and the Orion crew vehicle—a combined 22 percent from the FY 2016 enacted level—would have on making progress toward the humans-to-Mars goal.

Frankly, I am puzzled by the *déjà vu* we are experiencing with the proposed reductions to the SLS and Orion programs from the levels Congress appropriated for Fiscal Year 2016. Even more puzzling and somewhat concerning is the continued talk of targeting an internal date for the first crewed Orion and SLS flight—the EM-2 mission—in 2021 when the resources being requested are geared to a 2023 date.

The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel raised caution about this approach in its 2015 Annual Report when it said, “*NASA has briefed the ASAP on measures...that appear to be making safety trade-offs in order to maintain a 2021 EM-2 launch schedule.*”

The ASAP went on to say, “*While the desire to fly crew on Orion as soon as possible is understandable, NASA is building a long-term exploration program, and adjustments to the near-term schedule or mission content that result in far safer systems can be an advantageous trade.*”

Mr. Chairman, I know that you, I, and many of our colleagues here this morning want to get to Mars sooner rather than later. But we’ve got to establish an enduring system that will get us there and back safely, time and time again. To do so, we need to ask ourselves some important questions.

Will Congress and NASA be able to establish the budgetary and programmatic discipline required to meet this goal?

Will this Committee and Congress be true to providing the funding stability, sustainability and constancy of purpose that we and others have said are critical for NASA as we prepare to transition to a new Administration less than a year from now?

How will we navigate the bifurcated FY 2017 budget request, including both “mandatory” and discretionary funding, to provide the necessary stability?

Mr. Chairman, we owe our next generation a vibrant space agency, in partnership with industry, academia, and international partners, to continue its historic mission and to pursue the goal of one day sending humans to the surface of Mars. The future is now. The choice is ours. It is up to us to ensure the future of our space program is a bright one.

Thank you and I yield back.