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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Space Hearing
NASA Authorization Act of 2013
2318 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Statement

June 19, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing to discuss a draft of the proposed NASA authorization bill.

NASA has been and should continue to be the Nation's crown jewel for spurring innovation, highly-skilled and good paying jobs, and inspiring the next generation of scientists. It is vital that any new NASA Authorization match that standard.

I think we both agree that a strong NASA is critical to the nation and that this Authorization is a vitally important opportunity to set the policy direction and authorize funding needed to ensure America's global leadership in space.

It is my hope that we can work together to ensure that NASA's mission is clear, establish expectations that will inspire the public and workforce, and then provide the level of resources needed to enable the agency to be successful.

Doing otherwise would not only be a disservice to the men and women at NASA, its contractor workforce, and the American people, but would effectively set the Agency on a path to failure. I know that Members of this Committee want to see NASA thrive; we must have an Authorization bill that ensures that.

Mr. Chairman, we are not, nor should we be, the scientists and engineers who devise the programs and projects to meet the high-level goals of the Agency. *That* should be left to the capable experts at NASA.

I was pleased to see that the draft bill contains a number of reporting requirements and other provisions taken from the 2010 House version of the NASA Authorization Act of 2010, since those were not included in the enacted law because Members only voted on the Senate bill in 2010.

Developing a plan or roadmap for human exploration to Mars and seeking criteria for evaluating the potential extension of ISS operations beyond 2020 are just a few of the key areas where I see the potential to build consensus.

I am concerned however, with several aspects of this draft bill, and I question whether, in the end, this draft will serve to ensure our nation's hard-earned leadership in space and all the inspiration, discovery, international standing, and economic benefits that such leadership brings.

First, the draft bill would appear to shift the emphasis of NASA's core mission to human exploration. This is counter to the policy of NASA's organic Act, the National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958, as well as to the policy statements of multiple NASA Authorizations that have seen NASA as a multi-mission agency with significant activities in science, aeronautics, and human spaceflight and exploration, and technology development.

Another key concern is the level of funding that is authorized. The proposed bill would slash NASA's budget by almost a billion dollars relative to both the President's proposal for FY 14 and the pre-sequester funding approved by Congress in FY 12, and it would maintain that cut over each of the years of the Majority's Authorization bill. The severe cuts to NASA's top line are manifested throughout the draft bill.

For example, Earth Science would be cut by almost \$650 million relative to the FY 14 request, meaning the Earth Science account is cut by 1/3.

Cuts to Earth Science would not only result in gaps in the data needed to understand changes in our Earth system, it would also impact on the data needed for water monitoring, forest and timber productivity forecasting, improving gas and electric utilities load forecasting, and assessing the impact of sea level rise in coastal communities.

These uses and societal benefits are exactly what we hope for when we make federal investments in research and technology. To stop them would not be responsible. And the bill appears to shift all Space Technology activities to support only exploration-related technology development.

More importantly, the proposed reduction in funding for Space Technology will not keep NASA on a path aligned with 21st century innovation and job creation. Plans to pursue new technologies such as in-space propulsion and cryogenic fuel storage may suffer.

The impact of making these reductions was not discussed in preceding hearings, as they should have been. Compounding things, the bill establishes aggressive milestones and activities that run contrary to proposed downsized levels.

We cannot expect NASA to develop a sustainable and inspiring space program under these circumstances. Mr. Chairman, this Subcommittee has historically done best for NASA when we have moved legislation in a bipartisan manner.

As a minimum, now that the draft bill is open for discussion and before we consider moving to markup, we should first take the time to hold other hearings with valued experts and stakeholders impacted by the draft bill's provisions, especially in areas such as Earth science, space technology, and commercial crew safety.

As we will hear from one of the witnesses today, one way of counteracting the high cost of human space exploration may be in the form of expanded international partnerships. This is an idea that needs to be considered as the journey to Mars will be long, yet rewarding for the future of humankind.