

Congressman John Culberson
Testimony before the Science Space and Technology Committee
Space Leadership Preservation Act and the Need for Stability at NASA
10:00AM February 25, 2016

Thank you Chairman Smith and Ranking Member Johnson for scheduling this hearing to review the *Space Leadership Preservation Act of 2015* (H.R. 2093). I am especially thankful to your staff – especially Chris Shank and Tom Hammond, for working with me on this important bill.

I'd also like to thank Chairman Smith for his support as an original cosponsor of this legislation. And, I'd like to thank Committee members Sensenbrenner and Bridenstine for their support as cosponsors.

It is a privilege to be here with you today to discuss the need for stability at NASA.

Some of my earliest and best memories are of the space program. The excitement of the Apollo missions inspired me to get my first telescope when I was 12, and I have been hooked on space ever since.

As the new chairman of the Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Subcommittee, and a native Houstonian, one of my goals is to restore NASA to the glory days of the Apollo program. I am very proud that the final fiscal year 2016 appropriations bill included \$19.285 billion in funding for NASA. But, increased funding is not enough.

It has been nearly 44 years since any human has set foot on the surface of another celestial body. When Gene Cernan and Harrison Schmitt left the moon after three days exploring the Taurus-Littrow lunar valley, Mission Control in Houston read a statement from the White House to the Apollo 17 astronauts – “as the Challenger leaves the surface of the moon, we are conscious not of what we leave behind, but of what lies before us.”

But today, the glory days of the Apollo program are long gone and we have lost focus on exploring “what lies before us.” The team at NASA has faced program cancellation after program cancellation. Our space program is so off track that we have to depend on Russia for transport to the International Space Station.

This is not a partisan issue.

Over the last 30 years, NASA programs have been cancelled due to cost-overruns, mismanagement or abrupt program changes at the start of each new administration. In the past 20 years alone, 27 programs have been cancelled resulting in over \$20 billion wasted on uncompleted programs. That is unacceptable. Our space program is too important to continue on this path.

We need to improve morale at NASA, and come up with long-term missions that will inspire tomorrow's 12 year olds to purchase their own telescopes and study the stars.

I recently had the honor of hearing former Navy SEAL Robert O'Neill speak about his work as a SEAL. On May 2, 2011, Rob and his team took place in a raid in Pakistan. During the raid, Rob shot Osama bin Laden three times in the head. Rob's pride in his fellow SEALs was apparent as he told their story. He described how they train together and work to communicate effectively with one and other. One of the things that stuck with me from Rob's remarks was when he said that **a lack of a clear mission hurts morale.**

That is true for any team. Including the team at NASA.

NASA's dedicated employees are incredibly smart, but over the years a lack of clear mission has worn down morale at many NASA centers.

Today, if you were to ask any NASA employee, astronauts, scientists, engineers, or contractor, what the agency's top mission is, you would probably get a confused look and several different answers – everything from asteroid retroviral missions to returning to the moon to going to Mars.

This lack of direction is not the fault of NASA employees, and it is not the fault of this Administration. It is the result of a flawed governance structure at NASA.

The bill we are discussing today will improve our space program and improve morale at NASA centers by ensuring that we take the politics out of science and provide NASA with clear direction and guidance that outlasts the political whims of any one presidential administration – and the political whims of Congress.

The reforms in the bill draw on the best practices of other agencies.

For example, the ten-year term for a NASA Administrator proposed in the bill is modeled after the term for the Director of the FBI. A longer term for a NASA Administrator will keep an Administrator in place long enough to be held accountable for long-term projects.

The idea for a Board of Directors is based on the National Science Board and similar boards in the FBI.

The direct budget submission to Congress would be similar to the NCI bypass budget and would allow the best and brightest scientists to come directly to Congress with an honest budget submission for what is necessary to achieve those goals.

“What lies before us” is limitless, and I think if we make the changes I've proposed in the *Space Leadership Preservation Act* we will allow the rocket scientists and engineers and astronauts at NASA who have devoted their lives to exploring space the opportunity to help restore our space program to the glory days of the Apollo program so that America can continue leading the world in space exploration for decades to come.

I am honored to be here with you today and appreciate your time and attention to this legislation.

Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.