

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Donna F. Edwards (D-MD)
Subcommittee on Space
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

The International Space Station: Addressing Operational Challenges
Space Subcommittee Hearing

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Good morning, and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on “The International Space Station: Addressing Operational Challenges.”

About a year ago, I and the members of our Committee sat in this room and had the opportunity to communicate with our NASA crew aboard the ISS, including NASA astronaut Reid Wiseman from Maryland. Connecting real-time with our astronauts who are living, working, and carrying out research in a laboratory orbiting 250 miles above us every 90 minutes is an inspiration.

And thanks to NASA and the crews aboard the ISS, many U.S. school children have the same opportunity to ask questions and learn about human spaceflight through similar downlink events. Yet, in the thrill of seeing and hearing from those who inhabit our on-orbit laboratory, we can sometimes forget just how difficult, demanding, and risky it is to maintain and operate the ISS.

Orbital debris, malfunctions to key systems both internal and external to the ISS, and human health hazards pose significant risks to the ISS facility and its crew. The unfortunate loss of the SpaceX-7 cargo resupply mission less than two weeks ago, along with the earlier losses of the Russian Progress and Orbital ATK cargo missions over the past 8 months, are stark reminders of the risks and challenges that NASA and its partners continue to face.

The successful management of these risks for more than fifteen years is a testament to NASA and its industry and international partners.

I am confident that SpaceX and Orbital ATK, in collaboration with the FAA and NASA, will identify and resolve the problems that led to the launch failures and will resume cargo resupply to the ISS as soon as it is safe to do so.

Because, Mr. Chairman, we don't have time to spare.

The ISS is a temporary facility that is currently authorized for operations through 2020. Given that ISS operations cost about \$3 billion taxpayer dollars per year— a cost that is projected to increase, I might add—coupled with the challenges involved in sustaining operations, we need to ensure that our vision for the ISS is clear and our goals and objectives for using this unique facility are aligned with that vision.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased that the number of ISS users has grown. In addition to NASA researchers and NASA-supported academic researchers, the ISS National Laboratory management entity, CASIS, has drawn new commercial users including pharmaceutical companies to the ISS.

However, while the range of ISS uses is expanding, the resources to support those activities are not. Funding for ISS research represents a mere 12 percent of the overall ISS budget. In addition, constraints on cargo transportation to the ISS, as well as available power and precious crew time, limit what research can be accomplished on the Station.

And in that regard, I know that many of us want to understand the implications of cargo resupply interruptions on planned ISS research, crew operations, and the sustainability of the ISS.

In addition, Mr. Chairman, there is critical work to be done on the ISS in the areas of human health research and technology development that need to be carried out if we are going to make progress toward the long-term goal of sending humans to Mars.

In January 2014, the Obama Administration proposed to extend ISS operations until at least the year 2024. The Administration has three rationales for the extension:

- To complete ISS research that supports long-duration human missions beyond low-Earth orbit;
- To garner societal benefits from ISS research; and
- To give NASA and private partners more time to transition to commercial cargo and crew, allowing NASA to focus on human exploration of deep space.

Today's hearing provides us the opportunity to examine those rationales in the context of the cost and risks that NASA and its international partners will face in sustaining the ISS for that length of time.

Well, Mr. Chairman, we have a lot to discuss this morning. I want to thank our witnesses again for being here and with that I yield back.