

OPENING STATEMENT

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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“The Commercial Crew Program: Challenges and Opportunities”
Subcommittee on Space Hearing

February 27, 2015

Good morning. I would like to welcome each of our witnesses to today’s hearing. The topic of today’s hearing is an important one as it presages a new chapter in NASA’s human spaceflight activities.

Now almost halfway through this decade, substantial progress can be seen. The International Space Station was completed in 2010 and continues to show great promise as an orbital laboratory. NASA has started to build the next deep space exploration system of the future with the building blocks of the Space Launch System (SLS) and Orion crewed vehicle.

With the Space Shuttle retired, cargo resupply of the ISS is being turned over to two commercial providers, albeit a success made possible through substantial NASA financial investment and technical transfer. And, as we will hear today, NASA is working with Boeing and SpaceX to develop of future crewed commercial orbital transportation services to the Space Station.

This laudable progress is a testament to the hard work and perseverance by the NASA federal workforce and its industry partners. In the process, NASA has learned new ways of doing things and is adopting some of industry’s best practices.

Yet, we should not lose sight of the fact that routine access to space is hard. Nor should we forget the painful lessons NASA has learned along the way to mitigate the risks of sending humans beyond the confines of Earth’s surface.

This Committee has followed the many twists and turns NASA took in getting to this point with its Commercial Crew Program. Various contractual vehicles were used, and I will not take the time here to recount the Committee’s concerns about inadequate insight into contractor designs and conformance with NASA safety requirements.

On one hand, I am somewhat comforted that Mr. Gerstenmaier is at the helm and feel confident in his commitment to fly NASA astronauts on commercial transportation systems only when safety has been demonstrated.

On the other hand, I am not comfortable, nor am I pleased, that the Aerospace Safety Advisory Board known as ASAP, Congress’s safety adviser, was denied access to key information before contracts were awarded. Indeed, the Commercial Crew Program’s denial caused the Panel Chairman to state in the ASAP’s 2014 Annual Report that “*the Panel is unable to offer any informed opinion regarding the adequacy of the certification process or the sufficiency of safety in the Commercial Crew Program (CCP) due to constraints on access to needed information.*”

Clearly, this is troublesome.

If NASA is to convince Congress that the two commercial crew transportation systems are safe, it must provide ASAP with information, by which the Panel can make objective assessments.

Mr. Chairman, I recognize that NASA and its two contractors have much work to do. The nation needs their important contributions to the space program.

I hope we can continue this dialogue through future hearings as part of the open communications that must form the basis of trust and transparency in this government-industry partnership.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and I yield back.