OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Organizational Meeting

January 27, 2015

Thank you Chairman Smith. And before I speak about what we are meeting about today, I do want to take a moment to thank you for moving the organizational meeting back a week. I had hoped we would have our full complement of Members today, but the short weeks in January have slowed down the appointment process on our side.

But I do appreciate the effort you made to accommodate our schedule.

Unfortunately, the accommodation of our scheduling concerns did not carry over to our concerns about the proposed Committee Rules. I have serious concerns about these Rules.

To be blunt, the Committee Rules that were noticed last week are the single greatest attack on Minority Member rights in the history of this Committee. I do not make that statement lightly. The Rules shorten notice requirements for markups, and in fact allow the Majority to waive notice requirements altogether.

The Rules then eliminate review periods for Members to review legislative reports prior to filing. The Rules require more Members to support a request for a recorded vote. The Rules allow the Majority to hold a hearing without even a single Minority Member present. The Rules provide the Chair with unilateral subpoena authority. Finally, the Rules eliminate requirements for consultation with the Minority. I should note that these changes are in addition to the Committee receiving blanket deposition authority in the House Rules for the first time in the half century history of the Committee.

And for what, I ask? What grand legislation does the Chair have in mind that requires these attacks on Minority rights? I hope Members take a moment and look around this room at the portraits you see displayed. None of those Chairs needed to attack Member rights to accomplish their agendas. Chairman Miller did not when he oversaw the landing of Americans on the moon.

Chairman Teague did not when he helped create the Department of Energy. Chairman Boehlert did not when he helped create the Department of Homeland Security. And Chairman Gordon did not when the Congress overwhelmingly passed the America Competes Act.

Likewise, for what great oversight investigation does the Chair need his unprecedented new powers? Chairman Teague didn't need these powers when he investigated the deadly Apollo 1 fire that killed three astronauts. Chairman Fuqua didn't need these powers to investigate the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster.

Chairmen Brown and Wolpe didn't require these powers when they investigated the environmental crimes and subsequent cover-ups at the Rocky Flats lab. Chairman Boehlert didn't need these powers in the wake of September 11 or for the Committee's investigation of the Space Shuttle Columbia disaster.

Chairman Sensenbrenner didn't need these powers when he chaired the Committee. And for those of you who might not remember, Mr. Sensenbrenner was one of the prosecutors of the Clinton impeachment, so he wasn't someone you would call a softy when it came to oversight work.

Over the half century of work and accomplishments of this Committee, nobody needed to stifle debate and short change Minority rights to get the job done. And when I say Minority rights, I want to be clear that I am not just talking about Democratic Member rights. I'm talking about <u>any</u> Member who might not agree with the Chair, regardless of party affiliation.

These Rules affect the ability of <u>all</u> Members of this Committee to deliberate and debate the most important issues that come before us.

This is a disappointing way to start off the new Congress, and I would urge the Chairman to recess this meeting so that we can work across the aisle to develop rules that respect the rights and responsibilities of our Members. Failing that, I believe that re-adopting the rules our Committee followed in the 113th Congress, which, while not perfect, would be much more preferable than the proposed Rules before us today. With that, I yield back.