

## **OPENING STATEMENT**

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House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Full Committee

*“The Space Leadership Preservation Act and the Need for Stability at NASA”*

February 25, 2016

Good morning. I would like to start by welcoming our witnesses to today’s hearing. None of you are strangers to our Committee, and we always welcome your insights.

I would especially like to welcome my fellow Texan and friend, Chairman John Culberson, who I know shares my passion for NASA and the great things that it accomplishes for our nation. I would like to emphasize that fact. I believe that all Members of this Committee—and our witnesses—share my belief that NASA is a cornerstone of our nation’s R&D enterprise, a source of inspiration for our young people, and a worldwide symbol of America’s technological prowess and dedication to the peaceful exploration of space. We want it to succeed.

Today’s hearing is entitled *“The Space Leadership Preservation Act and Need for Stability at NASA.”* While I have concerns about the legislation itself, I wholeheartedly agree with the premise that we want to preserve America’s leadership in space, and that NASA will need stability if it is to maintain that leadership role. I am heartened that Chairman Culberson has long felt the same way.

That said, I regret that the legislation being discussed today, while obviously well intentioned, unfortunately is not likely to fix the fundamental causes of instability at NASA. Let me give just a few examples of my concerns with what the bill does—and doesn’t—do. First, the bill would establish a “Board of Directors”, apparently modeled after the NSF’s National Science Board. Of course, NSF and NASA are quite different agencies, with quite different missions, so the applicability of the NSF model to NASA is unclear. But there are other differences that also need to be noted.

As we know, the members of the NSB are all nominated by the President. The Board of Directors established in this bill, on the other hand, would have a majority of its members named by Congress using a formula that injects partisan politics into a Board that ostensibly is supposed to insulate NASA from politics.

In addition, the Board would be tasked with preparing a budget for NASA, in parallel with NASA’s own budget preparation process. This seems to be a prescription for wasteful duplication at best, with the potential for serious confusion and instability as the more likely outcomes.

It is unclear to me how this small group of individuals—with no agency management responsibilities or accountability—is supposed to develop a detailed budget for a 19 billion dollar agency without having to set up an unwieldy, competing administrative infrastructure of its own. This is an approach that will not lead to a good outcome. Instead, we should let the

dedicated women and men at NASA who are tasked with carrying out NASA's challenging programs be the ones who develop its budget request. It should not be done by a group of individuals who, talented as they may be, will have no accountability for delivering results under the budget they may propose. If we are concerned that OMB is adjusting NASA's budget request in unhealthy ways, then we in Congress already have sufficient oversight and budgetary tools at our disposal to correct the situation.

Next, the bill would establish a fixed, 10-year term for the NASA Administrator. I frankly don't know what problem this provision is intended to correct. A mission agency *benefits* from having an Administrator chosen by the President he or she serves. Having a carryover Administrator from a previous President's term will do nothing to ensure stability if the President wishes to pursue a different policy agenda from his or her predecessor and doesn't see that Administrator as being part of his or her "team". In addition, as history shows, having a fixed term for an agency head means little in practice—only 5 of the last 15 NSF Directors served out a full six year term, and similar instability has been the norm at FAA, despite a five year term for its Administrators.

I could go on, but the reality is that we don't need to set up a new bureaucracy outside of NASA or alter the appointment process for its leaders. If we are interested in ensuring stability at NASA, it is already in our power as Congress to do so. We are the ones who ultimately determine NASA's budget. We can provide the necessary budgetary stability to NASA—*or* we can destabilize it with appropriations delays, continuing resolutions, and shutdowns. The choice is ours. In addition, we have the ability to set a stable direction for NASA. And we did just that in the 2015 NASA Authorization bill that passed the House. We said that Mars should be the goal of our human exploration program. The President has agreed. We should take that consensus and build on it, rather than having an unelected Board put forth its *own* exploration vision every four years. The two congressional actions that I have just described—one budgetary and one policy-oriented—will do more to maintain space leadership and ensure stability at NASA than anything we might do in the bill we are discussing today.

In closing, I again want to welcome our witnesses, I appreciate your service, and I look forward to your testimony.