

**STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE HANSEN H. CLARKE  
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY  
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics**

*Examining NASA's Development of the Space Launch System and Orion Crew Capsule*

**Wednesday, September 12, 2012  
10:00 AM to 12:00 PM  
2318 burn House Office Building**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding today's hearing to review the current status and plans for development of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Space Launch System (SLS) and Orion Crew Capsule.

The NASA Authorization Act of 2010 directed NASA to develop both to support human exploration beyond low-Earth orbit, provide back-up capability to deliver crew and cargo to the International Space Station (ISS), and to preserve the critical capabilities of our aerospace workforce and industrial base.

The road to getting NASA's final SLS and Orion architecture underway was not an easy one.

In March 2011, at a Subcommittee hearing on NASA's Exploration Program, Members pressed NASA for a final decision on the configuration for the next heavy-lift vehicle for returning Americans to human exploration beyond low-Earth orbit.

A year ago this month, we got that decision in the integrated SLS and Orion crew capsule architecture that NASA is currently developing.

This system builds on the successful and proven Space Shuttle technologies as well as new developments begun under the former Constellation Program.

So while NASA's decision took some time, I am encouraged that just a year since announcing the final architecture, NASA and its industry contractors have made considerable progress.

An Orion capsule has been delivered to the Kennedy Space Center in preparation for an uncrewed test flight in 2014.

And the SLS has completed its initial stage of reviews, which confirmed the vehicle concept, the overall architecture, and the design and integration approach.

In addition to the 2014 test flight of Orion, NASA's plans include an integrated SLS and Orion uncrewed test flight in 2017 and the first crewed test flight by 2021.

I hope our witnesses today can help us understand the role of a robust and steady flight test program in retiring risks early, any challenges they face in meeting those milestones, and what is needed to ensure the earliest possible date for returning Americans to deep space exploration.

As Members of Congress we need to do our part in helping to keep the SLS and Orion programs on track.

We need to ensure that the program is making wise decisions and prudent use of the funds provided to it, and we also need to ensure that NASA is given the resources and stability that will allow SLS and Orion to succeed.

A year ago next week, American hero and Apollo astronaut Neil Armstrong, in testimony to the Committee, challenged the nation to return to human exploration beyond its near Earth neighborhood. “The larger human exploration goals...lie beyond LEO: Luna, the lunar Lagrangian points, Mars and its natural satellites, and Near Earth Objects including meteoroids, comets, and asteroids,” he said.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Commander Armstrong for his long service to this nation and to humanity, and for his inspirational and steadfast call to return humans to deep space exploration. Our thoughts are with his family as we mourn his passing.

Today, I look forward to hearing from our NASA and industry representatives on where we stand in pursuing those “larger human exploration goals”, what obstacles they face in continuing to make progress on SLS and Orion, and how Congress and the Administration can work together to help overcome those challenges.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, it is fitting that we are here today discussing NASA’s human exploration program.

Fifty years ago, President John F. Kennedy stood before the American people and committed the goal of sending Americans to the Moon.

America met that goal many decades ago.

It is time to return Americans to deep space exploration by renewing our commitment to achieving the inspiring goals that Congress has set forth in law through successive NASA Authorization Acts.

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.