

Opening Statement
Full Committee Ranking Member
Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
“Full Committee Markup Of 2013 NASA Authorization”

July 18, 2013

Mr. Chairman, I will be relatively brief in my opening statement. My view of the legislation we are marking up today has not changed since the Subcommittee markup last week. This is a bad bill, and while I and my Democratic colleagues will be offering amendments to address a number of the bill’s shortcomings, I don’t expect that any will be accepted that would fix the fundamental problems with this legislation. Given that, unless Ms. Edwards’ amendment in the nature of a substitute is adopted, I plan to vote against the bill and will urge my colleagues to do the same.

At the Subcommittee markup I said that the bill we are considering today *“will hurt the NASA Centers and workforce, cripple the agency’s ability to carry out all of the responsibilities the nation has given it, and put NASA on a path to mediocrity,”* and I stand by those words today. It gives me no pleasure to say that this is a terribly flawed piece of legislation. I deeply wish that it were not.

And I want to make clear that I don’t object to the bill simply because it is a Republican bill. This Committee has a long history of bipartisan support for NASA, and Republican Members have in the past been fierce advocates for a robust and ambitious space program for the nation. Yet this NASA Authorization bill breaks with that proud tradition, and I frankly am at a loss to understand why.

Instead of upholding a long standing Republican tradition on this Committee of strong support for NASA, this bill instead makes deep cuts to NASA’s funding, even cutting the funding for NASA’s Field Centers, including Johnson, Stennis, Marshall, and Kennedy as well as the other Centers. It underfunds NASA’s SLS program, in spite of testimony by the Majority’s own expert witnesses that such funding shortfalls would be setting the SLS program up for failure. It even cuts the account that funds NASA’s safety and mission assurance activities, something I know former Chairman Hall cares deeply about.

Why are my Republican colleagues, some of whom represent NASA Centers and the employees of the NASA contractor community, putting NASA on a path to decline and jeopardizing the jobs and programs of their constituents? I wish I knew. At the Subcommittee markup, we were told that sequestration was making them do it, but of course the Budget Control Act doesn’t put any limitations on *authorizations*—none at all. We were also told that Democrats were spending too much on welfare and other social programs so we somehow had to punish NASA for that, but of course this Committee has no jurisdiction over any of those social programs.

The reality is that we could cut NASA's funding to zero and that action would have no impact on the broader fiscal issues facing this nation. But it *would* mean that we were walking away from something that has made this nation great and has inspired generations of our young people.

Mr. Chairman, we are an authorizing committee. We need to carry out the serious oversight and craft the best policies possible for the activities within our jurisdiction. NASA is an engine of technological innovation and scientific advancement, a creator of good, skilled jobs, a symbol of American preeminence, and a source of national inspiration and pride. Yet the legislation we are marking up today takes NASA in the wrong direction and weakens it when we should be strengthening the agency to meet the challenges of the 21st century. We can and should do better, and I hope that we eventually will come together to forge a good, bipartisan bill for NASA that reaffirms this Committee's long tradition of support for America's space and aeronautics programs.