

OPENING STATEMENT
RANKING MEMBER EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON [D-TX]
March 7, 2012

Good afternoon, and welcome back, Administrator Bolden.

Today's hearing is an important one for the Committee, because NASA is a critical part of the nation's research and development enterprise, as well as being a source of inspiration for our young people and a worldwide symbol of American technological prowess and good will.

We need NASA to succeed.

It almost goes without saying that NASA's success will depend not just on the amount of funding it receives, but also on whether it is given tasks that are executable, policy direction that is clear, and a funding environment that is more predictable than it has been in recent years.

Which brings me to NASA's Fiscal Year 2013 budget request—a request that cuts NASA's budget by about a half percent.

The good news is that the cut is only a half percent, which can be taken as good news given the fiscal challenges the government is facing.

On the other hand, I think that the important role NASA plays in pushing innovation and in meeting daunting scientific and technological challenges argues for a bigger commitment to the agency than either the Administration or Congress is currently making.

I fear that years from now, we are going to question why we didn't recognize how important it is to maintain our investments in research and innovation and to continue to provide the means to inspire our students even in challenging economic times.

That said, NASA's constrained funding makes it doubly important for us to make sure that the budget request before us is one that is well constructed and sustainable.

I know that NASA Administrator Bolden, who has one of the toughest jobs in this town, will argue forcefully in his testimony that it is.

I respect him and the hard work that he has done to implement whatever budget he is given.

Yet, as Members of Congress, we have to take a hard look at the priorities in this budget and be convinced that they make sense.

Based on what I have seen so far, I have to say that I still have unanswered questions about it.

For example, this year's NASA budget request would cut NASA's planetary exploration program by over \$300 million—a 21% cut, with more cuts in the outyears.

It is hard for me to believe that such cuts won't do significant damage to our planetary exploration program—a program that has been a highly successful scientific undertaking that has captured the imaginations of people around the world.

I want to know *why* such cuts were made, and what—if anything—would be gained by making them.

More broadly, I am puzzled by the de facto priorities contained in this year's NASA budget request.

That is, this budget would cut funding for NASA's overall Science program; it would cut funding for NASA's Education program; it would cut funding for NASA's Aeronautics program; it would cut funding for the operations of NASA's Centers and Headquarters; and it would cut funding for the Space Launch System and Orion Multipurpose Crew Vehicle programs—despite SLS and Orion being called out as an agency priority by NASA, and despite Congress's direction that they be available as a crew and cargo transportation backup capability if needed.

On the other side of the balance sheet, funding for Space Technology would increase by almost 22 percent, and funding for NASA's Commercial Crew program would more than double to almost \$830 million.

I can understand providing more funding to NASA's Space Technology program—investing in technology is an investment in the agency's future, and NASA's Space Technology funding has lagged in recent years.

I have a lot more difficulty understanding the rationale for cutting all of the worthy programs I listed a minute ago in order to provide such a huge increase for the Commercial Crew program.

It's not because I have anything against the companies who are pursuing commercial crew contracts—I have heard them testify before our Committee and find their enthusiasm infectious. I wish them well.

But as a steward of the taxpayers' dollars, I cannot let enthusiasm override the need for responsible oversight.

Administrator Bolden, you are probably tired of hearing me ask the same questions year after year, but I still haven't gotten answers from the agency that would justify endorsing the course you are taking.

For example, NASA still has not provided us with an independent cost and schedule estimate for the Commercial Crew development program, and we basically have to take it on faith that your budget requests are neither too small nor too large—and that these vehicles will show up before it is too late for them to provide more than a year or two of support to the International Space Station.

Neither has NASA provided us with a good estimate of what it will cost the taxpayer for NASA astronauts to make use of these commercial crew services, but we do know that, using NASA's own budgetary projections, the full cost per seat when NASA's share of the development costs is factored in, is likely to be much greater than we are being charged by the Russians.

That *might* be justifiable if the government investment was opening up large new markets, but as I said last year, so far the only potential non-NASA markets you have identified for Congress are super-wealthy space tourists and non-U.S. astronauts—and I can't justify to my constituents the expenditure of their tax dollars so that the super-rich can have joy rides.

And finally, NASA has yet to provide a convincing explanation of why it reversed course and scrapped its plan to use FAR-based contracts—contracts that allow NASA to ensure that its safety and performance requirements are met for whatever systems it funds.

I will not belabor the point—Congress is going to need a lot more concrete justification than it has been given to date if we are to have confidence that the expenditures NASA is asking us to make would be money well spent.

Well, Administrator Bolden, we have much to discuss today.

I again want to thank you for your service, and I look forward to your testimony.

