

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Hearing on

“A Review of NASA’s Space Launch System”

Opening Statement

Good morning, and welcome Administrator Bolden. I first want to congratulate you and the entire Shuttle team on the truly spectacular launch of the Space Shuttle Atlantis. I watched a video feed of that launch in this same hearing room last Friday, and I can assure you that the room was packed with enthusiastic viewers of all ages. I know I speak for all my colleagues when I say that we wish the crew of Atlantis a safe and successful mission.

Administrator Bolden, as you know, you have been called to testify on NASA’s plans to develop the vehicles that will enable future human exploration beyond low-Earth orbit—vehicles that have been authorized and funded by Congress. However, as you also know—and will testify today—you still don’t have an approved plan to share with us. As a result, I expect that you will be on the receiving end of a lot of unhappiness and irritation expressed by many Members here today. That’s unfortunate, because the fault doesn’t lie with you. It’s my understanding that you have had a plan ready to announce for some time, but you haven’t been able to get the final okay to make it public.

That said, it is now past time for a decision and a plan to be announced. Three successive NASA Authorization Acts—enacted by Democratic and Republican Congresses and Presidents alike over the past six years—have directed NASA to undertake a program of human exploration beyond low Earth orbit. And the most recent of those Authorization Acts directed NASA to move expeditiously to develop the heavy-lift launch vehicle and crew capsule needed to enable those exploration missions—as well as to provide backup capability in support of the International Space Station. In short, Congress is not asking NASA to build a rocket without a mission, as some have claimed. Instead, we are asking NASA to build the systems this nation will need to carry out the exploration program authorized by successive Congresses and Presidents.

As I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks, the Shuttle program is drawing to a close. There are many talented men and women who have worked on that program and on the now-cancelled Constellation program who want to continue to contribute to our nation’s leadership in space exploration—but they don’t know what, if anything, is going to be there for them to work on in the coming years. There are impressionable young students—some of whom were in this hearing room last week to see the Shuttle lift off—who were inspired by the space program to study math and science, but who now don’t know whether there is even going to be a human space flight program when they get out of school. And there are our international partners, who wonder why the United States appears to

be adrift and ready to walk away from its global leadership in human space flight. Administrator Bolden, I suspect this state of affairs pains you as much as it pains me.

But I've been around long enough to believe that we can do better, and I think you believe that too. So I hope that when this hearing is over, you will strongly convey to those in the Administration who are dithering that it is time to move forward and let NASA get on with the tasks that the nation has asked it to undertake. At this critical juncture, we need to move ahead expeditiously to build the Space Launch System and Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle in a way that makes use of the human spaceflight skills and knowledge-base NASA has worked so hard to achieve and that inspires the next generation of explorers, engineers, and scientists.

And to those of my colleagues on the Majority side who are critical of the Administration's stewardship of NASA, I also hope that you will convey to your colleagues in Congress that NASA cannot do what we are asking it to do if its budget keeps getting cut. The proposed House CJS appropriation level for NASA is one that, if enacted, will simply add more stress to an agency and dedicated workforce that is already trying to do "more with less", and at the end of the day will put America on a path to relinquish its space leadership. I would hate for that to happen, and I don't believe you would want it to happen either, but we all need to recognize that votes on funding have consequences.

Chairman Hall, I am glad that we are holding today's hearing, and I look forward to Administrator Bolden's testimony. Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.