Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

Full Committee Markup

H.R. 8958, the NASA Reauthorization Act of 2024

July 10, 2024

Before we begin today's markup, I'd like to welcome Greg Lopez, the newest addition to our committee. I'm looking forward to working with you. And we're throwing you straight into the fire with a markup on your first day here.

Thank you all for joining us this morning as we consider legislation to reauthorize NASA. It has been over seven years since we passed a comprehensive authorization of NASA. I think we can all agree that is far too long for an agency of such importance.

We're at a pivotal moment in space exploration. Through the Artemis program, the United States will send astronauts back to the Moon for the first time in 50 years. We're making groundbreaking discoveries through our science missions. And as we celebrate all that we've accomplished on the International Space Station (ISS) over the last 25 years, we're looking ahead to the future of low Earth orbit (LEO).

But we're not the only ones expanding our presence in space. Just last month, China returned rock samples from the far side of the Moon. They're pursuing a lunar base at the Moon's south pole, and, given the Chinese Communist Party's behavior here on Earth, it's not unreasonable to be concerned that they will act in a similar manner in space.

We need to do all we can to ensure the U.S. remains the leader in space. So it's never been more important to give NASA clear, forward-thinking guidance through a reauthorization.

The bill before us today does that by providing thoughtful, strategic direction designed to advance NASA's work across all its mission areas.

To begin with, it reaffirms our commitment to human space exploration through Artemis and the Moon to Mars program. It provides continued support for the Artemis program, directing NASA to work with international and commercial partners to achieve our mission objectives.

It also reinforces the need for a steady cadence of flights and the use of the Space Launch System (SLS) and Orion crew capsule.

Recognizing the importance of the low Earth orbit economy, the bill facilitates the transition to commercial LEO services. It also ensures that we maximize the productivity of the International Space Station until the end of its lifetime and authorizes NASA to use U.S. providers to safely deorbit the station.

In our recent hearing on the NASA budget proposal, we discussed problems with time and cost overruns with science missions at the Agency.

These missions are the source of groundbreaking discoveries that help us understand our place in the universe and improve life here at home. From the Europa Clipper to the Mars rovers to the many research satellites in orbit, NASA's science missions provide valuable knowledge that we can't gain anywhere else.

This bill supports those missions and addresses the delays and cost overruns by enhancing oversight and encouraging a balanced portfolio of small, medium, and large missions launched at regular intervals.

It directs NASA to improve efficiency and expand partnerships with private industry, whether that's by acquiring commercial satellite data or continuing the Commercial Lunar Payload Services program, commonly known as CLPS.

And it supports ongoing and future missions by directing continued support for the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope, the Great Observatories Project, and the Mars Sample Return.

NASA is a leader in aeronautics research, from unmanned aerial systems to supersonic air travel and hypersonic systems. This bill supports their work to improve the safety and efficiency of aviation through transformative aeronautics technology. It encourages experimental aircraft development and empowers next-generation aeronautics technologies.

The bill also promotes space technology development, which is a fast-growing sector. Advances in space technology translate directly to advances in technology here on Earth, where we enjoy the benefits of this innovation.

It's critical that we maintain our competitiveness in space technology – both to drive economic growth and to ensure our leadership in space.

While there are many more details in the legislation, this is the overarching framework with support for exploration, science, and technology.

All told, what we have before us today is a comprehensive bill that gives NASA the direction necessary to maintain U.S. leadership in space.

This legislation is the product of months of bipartisan work. Ranking Member Lofgren and her staff have diligently worked with us to create a thoughtful bill that addresses our shared priorities.

I'm grateful for that partnership and for all the effort that went into crafting this legislation.

I understand that we have a number of amendments before us, and I look forward to considering those and passing an even stronger NASA authorization today.