Highlights of the NASA Authorization Act of 2013

This bill authorizes programs and projects at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for two years. Proposed NASA funding is consistent with the Budget Control Act and FY2013 appropriations--$16,865,200,000. If House-Senate agree to repeal and replace the BCA, then funding would be added to the International Space Station, Space Launch System, and Commercial Crew. NASA continues to be the world's premier space organization. This bill seeks to ensure sustainability of purpose and budget for high-priority programs.

NASA's Mission Objectives

Human Spaceflight: Building on the themes of previous authorizations, this legislation reaffirms Congress's commitment to space exploration, both human and robotic, using a "go-as-we-can-afford-to-pay" strategy toward NASA's missions. This bill makes clear that missions to lunar orbit, the surface of the Moon, and Mars are the goals for NASA's human spaceflight program with quadrennial reports for what progress has been made toward those goals.

In the near-term, the primary objectives for NASA human spaceflight include:

- Realizing the research potential of the International Space Station with an Office of Science & Technology Policy-led strategic plan for all science agencies to conduct research on the Station. NASA will study the feasibility of continuing its operational lifespan beyond 2020.
- Continued commitment to develop the Space Launch System and Orion Crew Vehicle to return to the Moon and beyond, but no funding for an asteroid rendezvous mission. Reiterates Congressional direction that Orion be a backup system to support the Space Station if necessary.
- Building Commercial Crew systems (with NASA funds) to launch American astronauts on American rockets from American soil as soon as possible, so we are no longer reliant on Russia.

Science Programs: Relying on the guidance of National Academy of Sciences Decadal Surveys, this bill restores proper balance to NASA's science portfolio. NASA Earth Science is reduced to 2008 spending levels to provide better balance of funding for NASA's planetary science programs. Thirteen different federal agencies fund $2.5 billion annually in climate science research, but only NASA has space exploration as its primary mission. NASA is still involved in Earth Science research—spending $1.2 billion annually. NASA must remain focused on building weather satellites for NOAA to meet our nation's urgent weather-monitoring needs, as well as building LANDSAT satellites for the US Geological Survey.

- Maintains launch date of the James Webb Space Telescope by 2018.
- Funds survey for potentially-hazardous Earth-crossing asteroids.
- Continues exciting search for planets around other stars and life on other worlds.

Aeronautics: A robust aeronautics research program is important for the safe integration of unmanned aerial systems into the national airspace as well as NextGen technology for air traffic management.

STEM Education: There's bipartisan agreement that the Administration's proposal to re-organize NASA's STEM education program is questionable. This bill maintains FY 2013 organization and funding level.

NASA Leadership: Witnesses have raised concerns that NASA have been too politicized in recent years, adversely affecting the success of NASA's programs. This bill would make the following changes: Like the National Science Foundation, the NASA Administrator would be appointed to a 6-year term appointment. The NASA Advisory Council would be structured to provide more stakeholder input, with appointments by both the Congress and the President.

Space Act Agreements: The bill provides greater public accountability and transparency on SAAs.

Controlling Costs: Requires NASA to enforce more cost estimating discipline for its programs, while restoring funds set aside for contract termination liability toward development work on high-priority programs.