

OPENING STATEMENT

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Subcommittee on Space
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

The Commercial Crew Program: Challenges and Opportunities
Subcommittee on Space Hearing

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Good Morning, and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses. Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing on *The Commercial Crew Program: Challenges and Opportunities*.

There is no denying that NASA and its commercial partners have taken great strides since commercial crew activities began about five years ago. Last Fall, NASA in partnership with two companies—Space Exploration Technologies and The Boeing Corporation—established contracts to finalize designs, undertake full development, and carry out the milestones needed to complete NASA’s certification requirements to carry NASA and NASA-sponsored astronauts to and from the International Space Station.

As I have recounted on other occasions, I used to be a skeptic of commercial crew and cargo transportation to support NASA requirements. And while I am now supportive of the commercial space transportation industry’s partnership with NASA, I remain committed to ensuring that these systems are safe.

As the title of the hearing states, there are both challenges and opportunities ahead.

First, the commercial cargo transportation program that is currently underway sheds light on some of those challenges. Initial operational flights showed up significantly later than initially anticipated and a mishap last Fall reminds us that spaceflight is indeed risky and hard. When humans are involved, the stakes are immeasurably higher.

Secondly, as we’ll hear from Admiral Dyer, the commercial crew program’s approach is to “buy” the commercial crew services rather than make or manage a development program. This paradigm shift carries risk in and of itself, given that the services to be bought don’t yet exist. In addition, the Aeronautics Safety Advisory Panel—ASAP—which Admiral Dyer chairs, has raised concerns about the transparency of the program in providing the Panel with the information it needs to evaluate safety. As you know, Mr. Chairman, safety has and will continue to be a priority of this Committee, and the NASA Authorization Act of 2015 directs that safety be the highest priority of the commercial crew program.

Third, NASA is requesting \$1.2 billion for the Commercial Crew Program for Fiscal Year 2016, an increase of over \$400 million from the FY 2015 enacted level. However, the Committee, despite having asked, has no independent external analysis by which to evaluate whether NASA’s budget requests for the

commercial crew program are on target, and whether the amount the taxpayers are being asked to pay is too much, too little, or about right. The NASA Authorization Act of 2015 directs NASA to provide that analysis.

I want NASA and its commercial partners to succeed so that NASA and the nation will regain human spaceflight access to low-Earth orbit once again.

Yet I also want to understand what the taxpayers are paying for and the terms and conditions involved. In particular, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about

- How will NASA, SpaceX, and Boeing ensure safety and a safety culture throughout the development process and the operational spaceflights, once they are certified?
- What contingency plans will be in place should commercial systems not be available by the anticipated 2017 date, or should one provider need to stand down for an extended period of time?
- What is needed to appropriately communicate the risks involved in commercial human spaceflight to Congress, the public, and other stakeholders?
- And what are the policies in place for cost reimbursement, liability, and risk assumption regarding individual “passengers” that contractors could potentially carry on NASA sponsored missions to the ISS?

Before I close, Mr. Chairman, I would like to note that while the Commercial Crew Program is important, I hope that this Committee will also have the opportunity to discuss **all** of NASA’s programs and plans that comprise its \$18 billion budget request for FY 2016. I think we need to continue our tradition of inviting the NASA Administrator to come in and testify on the agency’s budget request, and I hope we can lock in such a hearing in the near future.

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.