

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Space

*“AN OVERVIEW OF THE BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR THE NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE
ADMINISTRATION FOR FISCAL YEAR 2017”*

March 17, 2016

Good morning. I would like to join the Chairman in welcoming Administrator Bolden to today’s hearing.

Administrator Bolden, I appreciate your long and distinguished service to our nation and your steady leadership at NASA during a challenging and exciting time in the agency’s history. I know how passionately you care about the nation’s space and aeronautics programs, and I look forward to hearing your testimony today.

Today’s hearing marks the beginning of the Committee’s consideration of the President’s FY 2017 NASA budget request. This \$19 billion budget request is a strong endorsement by the President of the important role that NASA plays in advancing America’s R&D enterprise, and I appreciate his willingness to attach a high priority to NASA in this, his last Federal budget request.

That is not to say that it is a perfect NASA budget request or that I agree with all elements of it. But it is a good starting point for Congress’s deliberations.

Because that is what our focus should be today—what do we want NASA to accomplish and what are we willing to invest in NASA so that it can achieve those objectives.

It may be tempting for some to want to spend their time criticizing the President for what they consider shortcomings in his budget request, but I think that is not a good use of anyone’s time.

The President has submitted his NASA budget request to Congress. It is now our job to determine the funding NASA will receive and the policies it will follow. If we fail to do that, we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

That said, there is much to recommend in this NASA budget request. For example, I am excited by the Aeronautics initiative—I know the important role that aviation plays in our economy and our society, and NASA’s R&D has long provided the underpinnings for new capabilities in aviation.

I also am pleased by the investments made in NASA's science and technology activities. History shows that those investments will pay dividends in increased knowledge and new technological capabilities. On the other hand, I am disappointed that the funding for the Space Launch System and the Orion spacecraft—the systems that are essential elements of the nation's future human exploration initiatives—has been cut in this budget request.

Such cuts add just one more challenge to those already facing the team of dedicated men and women who are working so hard to turn those exploration goals into reality. I would anticipate that Congress will reaffirm its support for SLS and Orion by the time this year's funding deliberations are complete.

Which brings me to one final observation, namely, we will have a new President by this time next year. I know that there are those in NASA who feel the pressure to accomplish as much as possible on the new exploration systems before a new Administration takes power. That is understandable, but it can wind up doing more harm than good. In its latest report, the Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel has raised concerns that perceived schedule pressure—whether external or self-imposed—can lead to excessive levels of risk being taken on in order to try to meet an arbitrary deadline. That's not the path to a sustainable or a successful program.

I hope that NASA management and workers will heed the ASAP's concerns and not defer needed testing or make over-optimistic commitments in a shortsighted attempt to keep those programs alive in advance of a new Presidential administration taking power. To all those NASA and contractor employees I would simply say: Congress supports SLS and Orion and Commercial Crew, and we will continue to do so when a new President takes office. We know that what you do actually is “rocket science”, so take the time and the testing needed to do it right.

With that, Administrator Bolden, I again want to welcome you, and I look forward to your testimony.