



**Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Ranking Member Brian Babin**  
**Subcommittee Hearing Statement**  
**“NASA’s Aeronautics Mission: Enabling the Transformation of Aviation.”**  
Wednesday, June 26, 2019

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Modern-day aeronautics was founded by American ingenuity. While flying machines were proposed by great minds like da Vinci, and balloons and gliders preceded aircraft, it was two bicycle makers from Ohio that proved in 1903 that dreams are more than just imagination. They were the first to demonstrate an aircraft with powered flight in Kitty Hawk North Carolina, which propelled America to the forefront of a new technological revolution. Many were engaged in solving the riddle of flight at the time. Some, like Samuel Langley, were supported by significant government funding and the backing of established institutions like the Smithsonian. But it was the industrious tinkerers, backed by nothing but their own curiosity, who made the impossible possible.

Wilbur and Orville Wright, as well as many others, went on to proselytize the potential of aviation and participate in the nation’s first government aviation organization - the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA). Founded in 1915 to "supervise and direct the scientific study of the problems of flight, with a view to their practical solution," NACA’s roots in aviation formed the foundation for NASA. Those proud traditions continue today in the Aeronautics Mission Directorate.

NASA is currently tackling several technological challenges. They are developing the Low Boom Flight Demonstrator to enable commercial supersonic flight that will drastically reduce flight times. They are building off of the success of the X-15, X-43, and X-51 to continue research and development into hypersonic flight which could revolutionize spaceflight, enable faster transportation, and promote national security. While the U.S. has been at the forefront of hypersonics research for decades, Russia and China are making significant progress in the field, which threatens our national security. NASA is also supporting Urban Air Mobility, Electric Aircraft, and Air Traffic Management research to promote innovation and enable more efficient use of our air space. These are all fascinating fields of study.

One aspect of aeronautics research that we must diligently monitor is international competitiveness. While the U.S. has historically led the world in aeronautics and aviation, this lead cannot be taken for granted.

Other nations are investing significant resources to challenge our leadership. But many of those countries embrace a strategy based on subsidies and government sponsored monopolies that run counter to the American free market spirit. Before we adopt policies similar to our international competitors, we should consider whether some technological challenges are best left to the market to solve. After all, it was the Wright Brother's curiosity and drive that made them successful, not government subsidies or political favoritism. Similarly, when we compare investments in aeronautics made by countries like China to NASA or the U.S. government's investment, we must realize that virtually all of China's investments are made by the public sector, whereas here in America we have a vibrant private sector that is also investing in our nation's aeronautics future.

Aeronautics and aviation make up a significant portion of our nation's economy. Preserving our leadership role is something we can all agree on. I look forward to working with my colleagues in this Committee, with the Senate, and with the Administration to ensure the future of our aviation economy is just as bright as the past.

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