OPENING STATEMENT
The Honorable Steven M. Palazzo (R-MS), Chairman
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Examining NASA's Development of the Space Launch System and Orion Crew Capsule

September 12, 2012

Good morning. I'd like to welcome everyone to our hearing. I especially want to thank our witnesses for joining us today. I know many people put in a lot of effort preparing for these hearings, and we appreciate you taking time from your busy schedules to appear before the Subcommittee. I also want to assure you that we greatly value your expertise and wisdom, and that your testimony will benefit this committee in the weeks and months ahead as we endeavor to ensure development of these important new programs.

The purpose of today's hearing is to discuss NASA's and industry's progress, next steps, and challenges developing our nation's next generation heavy-lift launcher and crew capsule. For the next several decades, the Space Launch System and Orion multipurpose crew vehicle will give our country the capability to launch exciting new human spaceflight exploration missions and robotic science missions. No other country has the technical expertise or industrial base to produce anything similar to SLS and Orion, making it all the more compelling to ensure that these programs continue without interruption.

It's also important to realize other significant benefits that flow from the SLS and Orion programs. First, by building a heavy-lift vehicle, we'll enable bold new science missions and I look forward to Dr. Mountain's testimony about the scale of potential flagship missions that might be conceived for launching ten or fifteen years from now. I am optimistic that once our government's fiscal health has been restored, NASA will have the resources to again consider robotic flagship missions that will maintain the momentum we currently enjoy with missions such as MSL.

Second, looking at the health and vitality of our aerospace industrial base, SLS and Orion will continue to challenge our best and brightest engineers to design and develop advanced propulsion, avionics, and manufacturing capabilities that will maintain America's preeminence in space. To be clear, there are a number of emerging space powers who may, in time, be tempted to challenge our leadership in space, and especially space-based technologies that are fundamental to our economy, our quality of life, and our national security. We simply can't afford to scale back investments in aerospace R&D or we may, in time, put future generations of Americans at risk.

Finally, I worry that without SLS and Orion, NASA's and our country's ability to do 'the hard stuff' – cutting edge space exploration – would be seriously impaired. NASA's first 50 years plus of programs and missions have been awe-inspiring. I want to keep that spirit alive for decades to come.