OPENING STATEMENT
The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Chairman
U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Securing the Promise of the International Space Station: Challenges and Opportunities

March 28, 2012

I want to welcome everyone to today's hearing, and once again thank our witnesses for their time and preparation, and for sharing their experience and wisdom on the important topic of the International Space Station. The title of our hearing describes what we hope NASA can accomplish, "Securing the Promise of the International Space Station." The ISS is an extraordinary engineering achievement. And it is a remarkably successful international collaboration that presents us an unprecedented opportunity to accomplish beneficial scientific research. I would like to see the ISS live up to its promising potential. I would like to see it enable scientists and researchers to do innovative research – the kind of life-saving biomedical research – that can only be done in space. Fulfilling the promise of the ISS would not only serve humanity, it would also strengthen America's leadership in science, technology and education.

I am often painfully reminded that NASA will rely on our Russian partners for crew transportation to ISS for the next several years, however for the purposes of today's hearing we're not focusing on crew. Fortunately there are a number of options for delivering the supplies and equipment necessary to conduct the research and utilize the ISS. Our international partners contribute three different launch systems that are vital for maintaining and utilizing the ISS, and there are two domestic commercial cargo capabilities that will be tested later this year. In fact, the most recent European Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) was launched Friday and should dock to the Space Station around 6:30 this evening. We are reliant on the Russian Progress, the European Automated Transfer Vehicle and the Japanese H-2 Transfer Vehicle (HTV), but NASA does not have agreements with the European Space Agency to supply more Automated Transfer Vehicles after 2014, or with the Japanese Space Agency to supply H-2 Transfer Vehicles after 2016.

Now that NASA has finished ISS construction, I hope the incredible potential of ISS is not squandered because research funding is shortchanged, or because of poor coordination managing the U.S. National Lab, or because of reductions in launch capacity to support it, or because NASA just can't get the job done.

I also want to reiterate again that the NASA Authorization Act of 2010 directed that the Space Launch System and the Orion crew capsule be designed to provide a back-up capability for access to the ISS. After spending tens of billions of dollars to build the space station, Congress wanted to ensure that a national capability to access it was not jeopardized by over-reliance on untested commercial propositions.

Supplying and utilizing the ISS is simply too important to be left to others. Yet, NASA is pacing the development of Space Launch System and Orion to be operational around 2021, which could occur after ISS retirement. America's continued leadership in space, and our national security depend in large part on developing and maintaining this critical capability. I cannot stress enough the importance of accelerating this launch system to ensure we have an alternative method to transport people and cargo to ISS as well as to launch future missions beyond low earth orbit.