

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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Statement of Space Subcommittee Chairman Steven Palazzo (R-Miss.)
NASA's FY2016 Budget Request

Chairman Palazzo: The first and perhaps most important point I want to make today is that I believe the taxpayer's investment in NASA is generally well spent, and that I support increasing NASA's budget. Discretionary spending such as research and development investments at NASA are the seed corn of future economic growth. In order to preserve these activities, we must address the larger economic problems we face as a Nation. This involves either complying with the President's Budget Control Act which caps discretionary spending, or figuring out how to repeal, replace, or amend it.

Unfortunately, the President's budget proposal does not comply with his own Budget Control Act. Because the President failed to provide any constructive or workable guidance, Congress must now bear that burden. I had hoped that the Administration would have demonstrated leadership by proposing a realistic budget, but instead we were presented with a list of unfunded priorities.

At NASA alone, the President's request exceeds the budget caps by \$519 million. This isn't to say that this is an unreasonable request. After all, the increase just keeps up with inflation. The concern that I have is that the Administration did not propose off-sets to account for the increase; did not propose a workable solution to repeal, replace, or amend the President's Budget Control Act; and once again reorganizes priorities in previous bipartisan NASA funding bills that the President signed.

For instance, the budget proposes cutting the Space Launch System (SLS) by \$344 million; the Orion crew capsule by \$98 million; the Planetary Science Division by \$77 million; the Heliophysics Division by \$11 million; the Aeronautics Mission Directorate by \$80 million; and NASA education by \$30 million.

SLS and Orion are national assets. They are the tip of the spear in our nation's deep space exploration efforts. Cuts to the Planetary Science Division are emptying the pipeline for outer-planet missions and forcing scientists and engineers into other fields and to foreign projects. Cuts to Heliophysics are weakening our ability to understand and predict solar storms that could threaten astronauts in space, and impact communication, financial, and energy systems here on Earth. Cuts to NASA education hurt NASA's ability to engage and inspire the next generation of explorers.

These harmful cuts accompany increased requests for other activities at NASA. The President's proposal seeks to increase the Earth Science budget by \$175 million this year. This amounts to a 63 percent increase since 2007. The budget also seeks to dilute NASA's existing earth science research portfolio by conducting other agencies' work. It seeks to develop climate sensors for NOAA, and land imaging capabilities for USGS. While NASA certainly has the expertise to do this work, they don't have the budget or the requirements. NOAA is tasked with maintaining operational climate

measurements, and USGS is tasked to maintain Landsat measurements. If NASA is tasked to do other agency's work, it should do so on a reimbursable basis as it does successfully for other programs such as the Joint Polar Satellite System, and the Geostationary Operational Environmental Satellite System.

The budget request also seeks an increase of \$129 million for the Space Technology Mission Directorate and \$439 million for the Commercial Crew Program. I fully support developing the capabilities necessary to once again launch American astronauts on American rockets from American soil as soon as possible. I also believe that NASA should be investing in the technologies necessary to enable future exploration. Congress will have to evaluate these proposals to ensure they are the most efficient uses of taxpayer resources in a challenging budget environment. For instance, NASA has argued that it is necessary to fund two contractors in the Commercial Crew program to provide a redundant capability and enable competition to drive down costs. That is why NASA selected two contractors last fall.

Congress will have to decide whether a redundant capability is best provided by two contractors in the Commercial Crew program, or by external capabilities such as the Orion crew capsule on an existing launch vehicle. Existing law requires NASA to ensure that Orion can serve as an emergency backup to the Commercial Crew program. NASA has not devoted any effort to complying with this requirement. NASA could also resort to relying on the Soyuz as well. This is certainly not an ideal option, but it does provide a capability in the event that domestic contractors are late or experience setbacks.

The benefits of cost competition also need to be weighed considering the government now has fixed-price contracts. Ultimately, Congress will have to decide whether the nation should develop a capability or should stand-up a market. One thing that would assist Congress in evaluating this proposal is an Independent Cost Estimate (ICE) for the Commercial Crew program. NASA previously contracted for an independent cost assessment which only evaluated contractor-provided data. Now that we have fixed-price contracts from the contractors, NASA should initiate a more thorough (ICE) to determine whether the contractors can be reasonably expected to execute within cost and schedule.

Another NASA activity that would benefit from an independent cost estimate is the Asteroid Retrieval and Redirect Mission. Unfortunately, NASA indicated that it was unnecessary to conduct an (ICE) prior to selecting optional mission concepts, despite a recommendation from the NASA Advisory Council. The ARM mission still hasn't garnered any support in academic, scientific, exploration, or international communities. NASA's own advisory bodies have heavily criticized the mission. Without consensus, without a realistic cost, and without a clear explanation of how it fits into a broader exploration architecture, it is tough to see how this proposal gains traction in the remaining 18 months of the President's term.

NASA is at a crossroads. Unfortunately, the last six years featured drastic change with the cancellation of Constellation and uncertain direction with the President's ever-changing Asteroid initiative. Congress has been consistent in its guidance to NASA that it develop a long-term sustainable exploration strategy that is evolvable and flexible based on an uncertain budget environment. Recent announcements from NASA indicate that the agency is heeding that direction by working towards an architecture that can weather the storms of change that accompany new Administrations. Administrator Bolden and his leadership team have a tough job. General Bolden, I am glad you have the reins.

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