

Opening Statement of
The Honorable Pete Olson, Ranking Republican Member
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Hearing on *Decisions on the Future Direction and Funding for NASA: What Will They
Mean for the U.S. Aerospace Workforce and Industrial Base*
December 10, 2009

Madam Chairwoman, thank you for calling this morning's hearing. The decisions we make on the future direction and funding of NASA is a topic of tremendous importance to our nation. The state of the economy and jobs have been at the forefront of this Congress since we convened in January. Attempts to stem the tide of rising double digit unemployment have not worked. Against this backdrop of rising unemployment, we are facing decisions about NASA which will have a profound effect on not only jobs, but also on the critical knowledge, skills, and production capacities needed to maintain our Aerospace and Defense capabilities and compete in the 21st century. This sector of our economy employs over 262,000 men and women and accounts for about 60 percent of our total exports.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for their appearance today. I realize that each of you has spent considerable time and effort preparing for this hearing, and I look forward to hearing from you so that our subcommittee can benefit from your expertise.

Today we will focus on the impact of NASA's funding levels on the current workforce, which I am particularly interested in, but also on the enormous scope of the challenge facing the aerospace industry as a whole. There are many issues including: 1) a workforce approaching retirement without the opportunity to teach the next generational of scientists, engineers, technicians and program manager, the valuable lessons learned through years of experience, 2) a highly skilled contractor workforce at risk of losing their jobs as a result of the human space flight gap, 3) decreased opportunities for future engineers and scientists which by definition can and will reduce interest in the critical STEM education fields.

In a perverse way that could only come from Washington, we are concerned about a shortage of engineers and scientists. We are concerned about America losing important strategic manufacturing capabilities. We are concerned about attracting and retaining young, high quality students to the Aerospace field. Yet we are pursuing policies that in many ways may be exacerbating these very problems. In the debate about job creation, the intent was to create high quality jobs that pay good wages and that reward important skills. Those are the very jobs that are the norm in the aerospace industry. The automotive industry has been decimated. Last week's *Aviation Week* included an article about how the automotive industry is looking toward aerospace for their displaced manufacturing and technical workforce. We cannot let a similar fate befall our aerospace industries. The industries we depend on for our national defense are simply too important to lose.

The decisions we are making in Washington have affects far beyond the obvious. I have stated repeatedly that we must continue to stay the course with the Constellation program, and not just because of the significant job loss that would follow were we to cancel it. Stopping and starting a major program is not how you develop a technical workforce, attract workers, inspire future engineers, or stabilize a local and national economy.

Companies and communities are watching us, but so too are impressionable students who may go into science and engineering fields. If we aren't willing to commit to aerospace, why should they?

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman. I yield back by time.