

**Chairman Richard Shelby Opening Statement
Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science,
and Related Agencies**

**Hearing to Review the Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Request
for the for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

June 29, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

I am pleased to welcome Acting Administrator Robert Lightfoot to the Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Subcommittee hearing to examine NASA's Fiscal Year 2018 budget request.

Mr. Lightfoot and I worked well together during his tenure as the Director of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

Thank you for serving as NASA's leader during this time of change and I appreciate you joining us today.

The Administration has proposed a fiscal year 2018 budget of \$19.1 billion dollars for NASA, which is a reduction of 2.9 percent from the current year level.

While this overall cut is less than many other agencies experienced in the President's budget request, it still reflects a significant reduction of \$561 million.

This budget request attempts to navigate a challenging fiscal environment, but would disrupt ongoing missions and delay future exploration for years to come.

There are proposals to cut science missions and to eliminate the entire education directorate using the rationale that NASA could do without these programs under a reduced budget.

Other research programs are left with insufficient financial resources, which will make it impossible for NASA to meet its own management plans and launch schedules.

For human exploration, the current administration picks up where the previous administration left off, by projecting a lofty vision for space while providing a budget that keeps that vision from leaving Earth.

The Space Launch System and the Orion crew capsule are designed to break our human space program free of its decade's long tether to low Earth orbit, eventually sending our astronauts to Mars.

In addition, SLS will provide NASA with a versatile platform to deliver planetary robotic science and space-based astronomy missions.

SLS is the vehicle that will make possible many of NASA's goals to push the boundaries of exploration.

I look forward to an initial launch of SLS and will work to see that a crewed-launch will follow soon thereafter.

We must have an accurate budget to reflect these launch decisions and to meet our nation's exploration goals.

If the other pieces necessary for exploration are not ready, we will lose time and waste funds in the near-term that could be used for other important activities down the road.

NASA must ensure that the rigor with which it reviews its own missions is applied to all of its activities and avoid pressure to send astronauts to space at any cost.

There is a growing sentiment that NASA should change the way it does business; that it should be a buyer of commercial transportation services.

Were it not for billions in development funds from NASA acting as venture capital, there would be no companies attempting to one day take crews to the space station.

Even with this investment, the companies NASA will use for commercial crew services are behind in schedule, the program has increased in cost, and independent observers cite the inability of our partners to meet contracted safety standards.

While risk is inherent in anything NASA chooses to undertake, there is no replacement for proper analysis and reasonable precaution when lives and the resources of the nation are at stake.

When it comes to agency operations, I am encouraged to see the investments in information technology and cybersecurity in this proposed budget.

NASA is very popular with the public and also has a significant amount of data for scientists to use in understanding the universe around us.

It is incumbent that NASA be able to share its findings, but the agency must also maintain a secure cyber environment for operations.

NASA's innovative ideas often involve significant risk and also require significant investment.

This subcommittee has strived to provide balance funding to the overall NASA portfolio, while also ensuring that ongoing activities are appropriately funded to accomplish NASA's missions.

As with any administration, the proposed budget represents a snapshot in time based on decisions made with the most relevant information available.

As the subcommittee moves ahead to produce our annual spending bill, I look forward to working with you to achieve the appropriate balance for NASA's missions.

I now turn to Ranking Member Shaheen for her opening remarks.

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