

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

**Hearing to review to Review the Budget Request and Budget Justification
for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

March 10, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

Welcome to the Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee hearing on the President's Fiscal Year 2017 budget request for NASA.

I want to welcome Administrator Charlie Bolden, who will testify before the Subcommittee this morning.

Last year, Congress provided NASA with \$19.3 billion in the 2016 Omnibus that maintained a balanced space program, ensuring that NASA's priorities are able to move forward.

We hoped that this Administration would leverage the solid financial foundation we provided last year to move forward on all of NASA's exploration goals.

Unfortunately, that hope was short-lived.

The budget that NASA has presented to us claims to include a total funding level of \$19 billion. However, this overall amount is achieved through a combination of discretionary spending and an unprecedented amount of funding disguised as mandatory when it, in fact, is not actually mandatory.

Since the budget roll out on February 9th, NASA has used glossy rhetoric to mask the fact that \$763 million of the agency's requested funding is offset by proposed tax increases— such as a new \$10 tax on each barrel of imported oil – that Congress has not yet considered nor do I expect that we ever will.

The truth is that NASA's request is only \$18.26 billion, a cut of \$1 billion from what this Subcommittee provided in the last fiscal year.

These cuts, if enacted, would erode on-going science missions, jeopardize core operations and delay exploration launches.

I am sure it is no coincidence that most of these proposed cuts target programs that are supported by this Committee and other members of Congress – in both chambers and on both sides of the aisle.

The simple fact is that the Administration prioritized funding elsewhere in the government's budget, and it could not find enough discretionary funding to make NASA whole.

Once again, NASA has failed to propose a truthful budget that can accomplish the agency's goals.

In order to move forward in 2017, this Subcommittee must set aside these so-called mandatory spending gimmicks.

Instead, we must provide honest funding that is necessary to advance our nation's space program using discretionary spending that does not bust the budget caps agreed upon last Fall.

This proposed budget represents staggering reductions that would lead to a nearly one billion dollar reduction to NASA's discretionary budget compared to last year.

These proposed cuts could have both near-term and long-term implications that, if not corrected, will delay ongoing work and will drive up development costs – outcomes that this Subcommittee has worked hard to avoid.

Looking ahead, I am particularly concerned with the consistent lack of support for NASA's human exploration efforts to go beyond low Earth orbit.

The Space Launch System (SLS) is proposed to be cut by \$770 million, and its crewed vehicle Orion would be cut by \$217 million.

In addition, the proposed funding and development path for SLS ensures that our next crewed exploration vehicles would not even meet NASA's far-from-ambitious target of launching in 2023.

Surprisingly, NASA has not proposed a single dollar for the development of an upper stage engine that is absolutely necessary for a crewed mission that is only seven years away.

The request also would not allow NASA to stay current on its own Orion production and launch schedule.

Mr. Administrator, you have traveled around the country in recent months touting NASA's strong support for the SLS and Orion missions, when in reality this budget will effectively delay any advancement in a NASA-led human mission to Mars, or anywhere at all.

Quite frankly, if this weak budget plan for exploration is what the Administration calls "strong support", I hate to imagine what the request would look like if there was only a professed marginal commitment from NASA.

Other missions across NASA will also feel the detrimental consequences of this inadequate request level.

Planetary science missions such as Mars Opportunity, Mars Odyssey, and Mars Express would be totally reliant on imaginary funding to continue operations – and therefore are effectively cancelled in this budget.

Under this year's proposed budget request, the spectacularly successful New Horizons mission to Pluto, which had its mission extended, will essentially have to depend on a tax increase that has virtually no chance of being enacted.

Even the recent high profile announcements of aeronautics experimental flight vehicles would become greatly dependent on budgetary gimmicks.

Many other activities across NASA are open to additional risks caused by budgetary uncertainty.

Both the Inspector General and the Government Accountability Office have cited the risk from funding uncertainty as a top chronic concern at NASA, and this budget has borne out these concerns even further.

In fact, this budget creates more problems than it solves.

I find it disturbing that NASA's true priorities are not better reflected in an honest budget.

I look forward to hearing your views on these matters, Mr. Administrator, and ask that you work with our Subcommittee members to address our many concerns in the 2017 bill.

Now, before I yield to our Vice Chairwoman, I want to recognize that today is the last scheduled CJS budget hearing for this year.

And, thus, this is likely to be Senator Mikulski's final hearing as a Member of the CJS subcommittee, which she has helped to lead as chairwoman or as ranking member since 2005.

Senator Mikulski, you have been a great champion for all of our federal science agencies over many decades, especially NASA, and you have also served as a vigilant steward of how our tax dollars are spent.

You have consistently challenged NASA to be better, and because of your leadership, NASA has better served America's drive for exploring space and making new discoveries.

Extending the life of the Hubble Space Telescope, rebooting the James Webb Space Telescope construction, returning the Space Shuttle to flight after the Columbia accident – these are just some of the important activities you fought so hard for over the years.

You are a true and valued partner, and it has been a great pleasure and honor to work alongside you these many years. I look forward to one last year of writing this Subcommittee's appropriations bill together. It is my hope that we can get NASA's budget right again this year.

I now turn to Senator Mikulski, for her opening statement.

