



Committee on Science

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Subcommittee Focuses on Ensuring the Health and Vitality of NASA's Current and Future Workforce

(Washington, DC) The House Committee on Science and Technology's **Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics** today examined a range of National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) workforce issues identified by the recently released reports of two independent review panels. The Subcommittee's work is aimed at ensuring the health and vitality of the NASA workforce in the 21st century.

"Now it's obvious that NASA's workforce is critical to the success of NASA's missions," said **Subcommittee Chairman Mark Udall (D-CO)**. "Yet it should be equally obvious that the continued health and strength of NASA's workforce cannot be taken for granted. It needs to be nurtured, supported and given the tools and resources it will need to carry out the complex and challenging missions it has been asked to undertake in science, aeronautics and human space flight and exploration."

This hearing updated and expanded on a 2006 Committee hearing that clearly established the workforce challenges NASA is facing as it gears up for its human exploration initiative, deals with the generational transition in the NASA workforce and struggles to maintain competencies across NASA's core missions in a highly constrained budgetary environment.

Two recent independent reports on NASA's workforce were discussed at today's hearing - the National Academy of Public Administration's (NAPA) study entitled *NASA: Balancing a Multisector Workforce to Achieve a Healthy Organization*, and the National Academies *Building a Better NASA Workforce: Meeting the Workforce Needs for the National Vision for Space Exploration*.

The Subcommittee looked at these studies' findings in light of whether NASA's current workforce strategy is the right approach for building the NASA workforce of the future.

NASA is undertaking a sizeable shift of programmatic activities as the agency endeavors to carry out the President's Vision for Space Exploration. In addition to implementation of the Vision, NASA is in the midst of a range of significant activities including, retiring the shuttle by 2010,

completing the International Space Station (ISS), developing the Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle (CEV) and the Ares Crew Launch Vehicle (CLV), refocusing the aeronautics program and dealing with a growing, retirement-eligible workforce – all while having to maneuver in a highly constrained budgetary environment.

NASA's workforce includes a total of 18,434 civil servants (as of April 2007) and approximately 44,023 contractors (as of April 2006). The largest numbers of civil servants and contractor employees are retained at Johnson Space Center, Kennedy Space Center, Marshall Space Flight Center and Goddard Space Flight Center, respectively.

“NASA's civil service workforce consists of some of this nation's ‘best and brightest,’” added **Udall**. “In most cases, they have made a long-term commitment to public service. I respect them for that commitment, and I think that whatever workforce strategy NASA develops should build on the strengths that those individuals bring to the agency.”

Pursuant to the NASA Authorization Act of 2005, the Agency has developed a Workforce Strategy intended to ensure that NASA possesses a workforce of the appropriate size and skills to carry out its programs. However, the strategy only covers the period through FY2011.

Subcommittee Members questioned what, if any, actions NASA has planned to address the longer-term workforce needs and how it intends to respond to issues raised by the two independent panels.

Of particular concern to the Subcommittee was NASA's workforce strategy with regard to the agency's aeronautics and science programs. The National Academies report recommends that “NASA should assess whether the skill levels of in-house scientists at each field center are appropriate to fulfilling that center's scientific leadership and service responsibilities and should ensure that appropriate efforts are made to maintain the scientific competency and currency of each center's scientific workforce.”

The NAPA and National Academies reports also seem to suggest that NASA's workforce planning would benefit from the same innovation and external partnerships that make the agency's space missions so successful. The National Academies state that “the solution to NASA's workforce issues is not to be found by considering NASA in isolation from the rest of the aerospace ecosystem [NASA, Department of Defense, industry and universities].”

“NASA must adopt policies that, while relatively inexpensive, can have a longer-term impact on its ability to obtain the highest-quality personnel. The development of the right people is as important as the right hardware. NASA policies must recognize and reflect this attention,” added Dr. David C. Black, President Emeritus of the Universities Space Research Association and Adjunct Professor at Rice University. He testified today in his capacity as Co-Chair of the National Research Council Committee at the National Academies that issued the workforce assessment.

Chairman Udall also noted that NASA needs sufficient funding to address the tasks it will be undertaking. “Money alone will not ensure that NASA will have the strong and vital workforce

that it needs, but insufficient funding will undercut whatever workforce initiatives are put in place,” concluded **Udall**.

The Subcommittee plans a follow-on hearing later this year to examine some of the particular civil service and contractor workforce challenges that are associated with the upcoming retirement of the Space Shuttle. Additionally, the Subcommittee will review the proposed legislative provisions that have been provided to Congress by NASA to address some of those workforce challenges.

For more information on the hearing, follow this link.

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