

**Statement of Bill Nelson**  
**Hearing: NASA Budget**  
Wednesday, February 28, 2007

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Good afternoon and welcome to this hearing on NASA's 2008 Budget Request. We welcome as our witness today NASA's Administrator, Dr. Michael Griffin, and extend a special welcome to the crew of STS-116 who are here visiting this afternoon. In December, Commander Mark Polansky and Mission Specialists Robert Curbeam, Joan Higginbotham, Nicholas Patrick, and Christer Fuglesang successfully completed the latest construction mission to the International Space Station. This crew conducted four spacewalks and installed the station's permanent power system. Congratulations on your success and thank you for being here today.

Since the last time we gathered to hear from Dr. Griffin in this forum, NASA has safely flown three shuttle missions, bringing the International Space Station to 60% complete and restoring America's confidence in the Space Shuttle Program. NASA has successfully launched five science missions that will lead to better understanding of our home planet, our solar system, and the universe beyond. A NASA scientist, Dr. John Mather, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics this year, and the transition is underway to replace the Shuttle with the Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle and Ares Crew Launch Vehicle.

With the successes of the past year in mind, we are also aware of the challenges NASA faces in the future. First, it must safely complete the International Space Station and the remaining shuttle flights. NASA must develop a new vehicle to take humans to the space station, the moon, and beyond – and do so with the shortest possible gap between the shuttle and Orion/Ares programs. And, NASA must continue implementation of a balanced program of exploration, science, and aeronautics. This is an ambitious agenda that was accepted by this committee and the Congress, in a bi-partisan way, when we passed the NASA Authorization Act of 2005.

However, in each year since, the White House has requested less funding for NASA than authorized by that act. For that reason, and due to the continuing resolution for this fiscal year, NASA will receive \$1.7 billion less than authorized in 2007. If the President's 2008 budget is adopted, NASA will have received three billion dollars less than the amount planned under the two-year authorization act. These shortfalls are in addition to the \$2 billion that this little agency had to take from other programs to recover from the tragedy of the Columbia accident and return the shuttle to flight. If we continue on the President's path, we face an extended period when the United States will have no human access to space. I say this is unacceptable – especially at a time when other nations are aggressively developing space technology. Last month's reckless anti-satellite test by the Chinese reminds us that we cannot afford to remain Earth-bound while others pursue space capabilities with questionable intent.

And so Dr. Griffin, we've invited you to tell us today about the challenges you face implementing NASA's program in this budget environment. We will also be looking into steps we in the Congress can take to help you meet some of those challenges, and I look forward to working with you to see if, together, we can find some helpful answers. Thank you for your presence here today, and I look forward to hearing your testimony.