

Statement of Ted Stevens
Hearing: NASA Budget
Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing on NASA's FY 2008 Budget Request. NASA has an important role to play in helping this nation expand its technological edge and conducting exciting exploration into the heavens—and in better understanding our own Earth.

I am also delighted to see some of the crew members of the most recent Space Shuttle mission—STS-116—join the Administrator briefly at this hearing, led by their Commander, Mark Polansky.

Their mission was extremely successful and marked an important turning point in assembling the International Space Station by getting its permanent power system ready to receive the research laboratories of our international partners, and come closer to being the great scientific laboratory we have always intended it to be.

Of course, I am always pleased when an Alaskan native is able to play a key role in a mission, as did Astronaut and Navy Commander Bill Oefelein, the Pilot for this mission, who is from Anchorage. I am sorry that he had a scheduling conflict and could not be here with you today, but I want to congratulate all of you on your fine service and dedication to space exploration.

The NASA Budget request reflects the continued support of the Administration for NASA. In a very constrained budget, the President has recommended a little over 3% increase over what was requested for FY 2007.

As it happened, the amount appropriated in the year-long Continuing Resolution did not get approved, and so there will have to be some adjustments to the request, which I understand Dr. Griffin will be providing to the Congress in the near future.

I believe we need a strong commitment to NASA and its programs, and I hope we can find the best means of providing the resources to allow the agency to carry out all its objectives.

One area I am especially interested in is the research NASA is doing to help us understand the question of the causes and effects of global climate change.

This is an area of particular interest to Alaska, where we feel the impacts of many environmental changes sooner than much of the rest of the world.

There are complex relationships between such forces as ocean surface changes and temperature variations and air currents bringing warmer precipitation to places like Alaska, where the permafrost is affected, and causing increased release of methane gases, which in turn affects the ozone layer.

We need to understand these forces, and I will be interested to hear how NASA's Earth Science programs can help increase that understanding.

I look forward to your testimony, Dr. Griffin, and working with the Chairman and Ranking Members of this Subcommittee and the Chairman of the full Committee in charting a solid future for NASA.