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**Statement of
Michael D. Griffin
Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

before the

**Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss NASA's Astronaut Medical and Behavioral Health Care Program, and the report of the Astronaut Health Care System Review Committee, released on July 27, 2007. In the wake of the recent incident involving former astronaut Lisa Nowak, I directed NASA's Chief Health and Medical Officer, Dr. Richard S. Williams, to conduct a review of the medical and behavioral health services available to NASA astronauts at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. My goal was to determine whether the incident may have been in any way foreseeable by those entrusted with the care of NASA astronauts. I hoped to learn whether the screening and evaluation procedures that the Agency employs for astronaut selection and assignment are as effective as they can possibly be, and whether the physical and mental health systems we have in place to support the astronaut corps are serving their intended purpose to the maximum possible extent.

In addition, Mike Coats, Director of Johnson Space Center (JSC), led an internal review that outlined and evaluated JSC's extensive health care programs for our astronauts, which includes their behavioral health, and recommended improvements to those programs, which we have already implemented. A more extensive behavioral health assessment will be added to annual flight physical examinations for all astronauts. We also are emphasizing the importance of behavioral health support to Shuttle crewmembers, and offering time with behavioral health providers before, during and after flight. And, we are committed to improving the quality and usefulness of our psychological testing and assessment during astronaut selection.

The Review Committee convened by Dr. Williams was comprised of eight representatives of other Federal agencies, highly experienced in the disciplines relevant to aerospace medicine and mental health, including a former astronaut and medical doctor. The Committee was chaired by Air Force Colonel Richard Bachmann, Commander of the U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine, from whom you have already heard today. I wish to acknowledge the commitment of time, effort, and dedication to the task put forth by Col. Bachmann and the members of the Review Committee in conducting their review and providing their report.

The Astronaut Health Care System Review Committee's report provided a number of recommendations that we believe will clearly improve our ability to provide comprehensive medical and behavioral health

care support to the astronaut corps. Dr. Williams and his staff at both NASA Headquarters and the JSC, with the assistance of NASA's Medical Policy Review Board, have begun the process of implementing enhancements to NASA's Medical and Behavioral Health Care Program. We believe these enhancements will contribute in great measure to ensuring a continued history of stellar performance by the astronaut corps, while addressing gaps in support that have been identified by the Review Committee. Today you have heard Dr. Williams describe some of these improvement plans and efforts.

The Review Committee's report also contained findings that were based on anecdotal information provided to the Committee by unidentified personnel at JSC. These findings, which have received a particular focus of attention from the media, allege instances of alcohol abuse by astronauts on active flight status, and further, cite faults in communication between astronauts, their medical support professionals, and their management. The specter of problems with communication pathways between critical elements of the flight safety support team is a very serious concern, and one that I take seriously. Given the need for further information on which to make assessments regarding these findings, I asked Mr. Bryan O'Connor, NASA's Chief of Safety and Mission Assurance, to conduct an investigation into the anecdotal statements in the report related to astronauts being impaired by alcohol in the immediate pre-flight period and claims of management not being responsive to concerns by flight surgeons and others about astronauts' fitness to fly. Today you have heard Mr. O'Connor provide details of his investigation and findings. After reviewing 20 years' worth of records and interviewing scores of NASA personnel who are personally involved in, or witness to, the critical path for astronaut flight safety in the hours before launch, Mr. O'Connor was unable to find any evidence to support the claims that astronauts were ever impaired by alcohol at launch time. In fact, NASA's flight surgeons have placed their names on a communication saying that they have no evidence of alcohol impairment by astronauts on flight day, or any instances of their concerns to management being disregarded. I have stated previously that NASA takes these allegations very seriously—just as we would any issue that could impact the safety of our missions. But, at the same time, I also have said that the stories cited in the report seem improbable to those of us familiar with the astronauts' rigorous and very public activities during the hours leading up to a space flight.

Nonetheless, I remain highly cognizant of Mr. O'Connor's forthright acknowledgement, both in his summary findings and in person, that his investigation was conducted within limitations regarding anonymity, and that, in spite of overwhelming indicators that such behaviors could not occur without undue notice or redress, he cannot report conclusively that the incidents reported to the Review Committee did not happen. Therefore, it is only prudent that NASA move forward with purpose to close any gaps in policy and process, and take action to ensure that such occurrences and the possible risks that they could engender, do not ever become validated fact. I view the findings and recommendations provided by Col. Bachmann and the Members of the Review Committee as an opportunity for NASA to apply rigor and raise the standard for performance in teamwork and communication among its astronauts and their medical and behavioral flight safety team and operational flight safety personnel.

To achieve these goals, NASA's Medical Policy Board, made up of senior internal and external medical experts, is working with NASA's medical managers to determine how many of the changes and initiatives advocated by the Review Committee would fit into NASA health-care procedures in a way that improves their effectiveness. We have accepted the report's recommendations concerning analysis and use of behavioral health data to improve selection criteria, and will convene expert working groups to advise us on any changes to our psychological testing. NASA is evaluating the overall delivery of behavioral health services to astronauts and is planning additional training for flight surgeons in behavioral health assessments. As I have noted above, we will add behavioral health evaluations to annual flight physicals for all astronauts and we will strive to ensure better communication throughout the astronaut health-care system. We will work to ensure that astronauts understand fully the nature and purpose of all health related testing and data collection. We are re-evaluating our electronic medical records system to assure

maximum utility and security of private medical information. Further, we are examining policies for assuring the quality of care we arrange for our astronauts by outside medical providers to determine if changes are needed. Importantly, we are working to ensure that everyone in the astronaut health-care system understands the multiple pathways which are available to raise any health and safety concerns.

America's astronauts have always operated with the knowledge that much is expected of them in many areas, including personal conduct. But until now, these expectations and standards have not been codified into an official document. The JSC Astronaut Office is developing a formal code of conduct that will be a document outlining the expectations for this highly skilled group of professionals. To address organizational culture issues discussed in the report, NASA will conduct a number of internal assessments, including anonymous surveys to be completed by astronauts and flight surgeons, to provide feedback and gather information that we will use to improve communication and ensure that leadership is responsive to concerns and complaints, particularly those involving flight safety.

I am confident that the comprehensive slate of actions that is underway for improvements and enhancements to NASA's Medical and Behavioral Health System will yield a program capable of delivering the highest possible level of support to the astronaut corps and ensuring its continued unsurpassed performance. I am particularly proud to be making these statements today in the wake of another such demonstration of personal, professional, and technical excellence provided by the crew of the Space Shuttle Mission STS-118, which landed safely on August 21, 2007, after a very successful mission. In addition to adding a new segment to the International Space Station, successfully navigating demanding spacewalks, and delivering needed supplies to the Station, the crew and their NASA colleagues on Earth provided a fully validated example of the superb ability of the NASA team to communicate and engage in critical technical dialogue across disciplines to support educated decision making in the face of real-time challenges. And to top it all off, through the efforts of Educator-in-Space Barbara Morgan, America's students were offered new and focused interactive opportunities to share in the excitement of this ongoing endeavor. This is the positive story that often takes a back seat to the sensational in news reports, but a story that I am honored to point out on behalf of the NASA astronaut corps and the teams of technical professionals that support them.

I would once again like to thank Col. Bachmann and the members of the Review Committee for their efforts. I would like to reassure the members of the Review Committee that, while much media attention has been given to the allegations relating to alcohol use, I and other NASA managers are giving the entire report the full and complete attention it deserves. We appreciate their interest in helping us to make NASA a better agency.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I would be please to respond to any questions that you may have.