

The Honorable Pete Olson (R-TX)
Ranking Member, U.S. House Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee
Remarks to the Augustine Panel
Wednesday, June 17, 2009

Mr. Augustine, members of the Review Panel, thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I was pleased when the Administration announced the members of this panel. You all bring different expertise to this task and I look forward to working with you during your review, as well as afterwards in response to your recommendations. As I'm sure you are aware, your work is being closely watched within the space community, in the media, and particularly on Capitol Hill.

NASA and human spaceflight have bipartisan support on the Hill, but unfortunately too many of my colleagues are unfamiliar with the challenges facing our human spaceflight program. Members and staff are going to give tremendous weight to your findings with respect to the future direction NASA should be taking. I know you take this responsibility seriously, and I know you understand the influence your review will wield.

I understand you are headed to the Johnson Space Center in late July and I look forward to welcoming you. The Johnson Space Center is the lead center for the Constellation program. The Constellation system, including the heavy lift Ares 5 launch vehicle, holds the promise of returning America to exploration beyond low Earth orbit. The Congress has endorsed that plan since 2005, and NASA has had a remarkably stable direction for the last several years. Our problem is not lack of vision, it's a lack of commitment.

I am proud to represent Texans, but my concerns are not limited to Texas. The United States is the global leader in aerospace. Aerospace is one of our most successful export markets and the driver of much of our new technology. For the past six months that I have been in Congress we have decried the loss of prestigious industries that were once dominated by American companies. I believe it is good policy to foster the creation of good paying jobs and we have

worked to establish educational initiatives to promote a technical and highly skilled workforce.

Human spaceflight provides all of these things. You all know this, and I hope that these points will be reiterated in your findings. Most of us who follow the space program closely know the impending problems. But there are other Members on Capitol Hill who will soon be asking why we won't have our own independent access to the space station that is primarily funded by the American taxpayer. The American public will ask why we are paying the Russians to fly our astronauts. Others will ask why we didn't accelerate development of Constellation to narrow the gap following retirement of the shuttle. And as we all know , the gap will be very damaging to our aerospace workforce.

The job losses are real, and they are jobs we won't easily get back, and as this economy struggles to rebound, this kind of job loss will not be ignored. It shouldn't happen under any circumstance, but I'm just reiterating the context of the work you are undertaking.

NASA and human spaceflight is at a crossroads, no entity will have a bigger say that you will. I wish this panel the best and pledge the full support on behalf of Ranking Member Hall, myself, and my colleagues.