

## Opening Statement

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**Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics**  
**U.S. House Committee on Science**

**Hearing: *The NASA Workforce: Does NASA Have the Right Strategy and Policies to Retain and Build the Workforce It Will Need?***

**June 13, 2006**

Good morning. I want to join the Chairman in welcoming the witnesses to today's hearing.

Ensuring that NASA has the right workforce for the future is going to be no small task, so we look forward to hearing your perspectives. However, it's clear to me that it will take more than one hearing to adequately address the issues surrounding NASA's workforce strategy and planning.

I hope that this hearing will just be one in a series of hearings on this topic - we owe it both to the highly talented NASA employees as well as to the broader aerospace community to make sure NASA and Congress "get it right" in attempting to shape NASA's future workforce.

Now, it should be evident that NASA's civil service workforce consists of some of this nation's "best and brightest." 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 because if those skills are discarded, whether for short-term budgetary reasons or for some other reason, we could find out at a later date that it is difficult, if not impossible, to recapture skills that the nation discovers it needs.

In that regard, I look forward to hearing from the representative of NASA's professional and technical engineers union to get the perspective of the employees on what NASA needs to do to attract and retain the best workforce possible.

This subcommittee needs to hear what the NASA *employees* think NASA is doing right - as well as what they think needs correcting. Yet NASA's civil service workforce is only part of the overall workforce equation.

NASA has long depended on the private sector to help carry out a significant portion of the agency's activities. While that contractor workforce is not the prime focus of today's hearing, the issue of how best to balance the roles of NASA's civil service and contractor workforces is one that the agency has wrestled with for a long time - with different Administrators often reaching different conclusions.

Currently, the problem of attaining an appropriate balance is made even more difficult by the ill-advised cuts that have been made to NASA's aeronautics, microgravity life and physical sciences, and long-term technology development programs, as well as to parts of NASA's space and Earth sciences activities.

In fact, those cuts are hurting researchers across-the-board: at NASA Centers, at universities, and at companies and other organizations as well as diminishing the amount of productive research that can be undertaken at each of those places.

Moreover, I fear that those cuts are going to wind up discouraging the *emerging* generation of scientists and engineers from pursuing careers in space and aeronautics at NASA - something that an agency with an aging workforce like NASA's can ill-afford.

I have made no secret of my belief that an exploration initiative that can only be implemented by cutting or eliminating other core NASA missions is going to be difficult to sustain. Similarly, a *workforce strategy* for NASA that is based only on the needs of the President's exploration initiative may also prove difficult to sustain.

Mr. Chairman, we have important issues to consider today. I again want to welcome our witnesses, and I look forward to their testimony.