

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
OPENING STATEMENT FOR GRIFFIN HEARING
June 28, 2005

It is a great honor and pleasure to welcome Mike Griffin this morning in his first appearance before this Committee as NASA Administrator. Dr.Griffin appeared before us many times as a private citizen and he has long served this Committee as a trusted advisor. The announcement of his nomination was greeted in these precincts with something close to glee.

And we have not been disappointed. Mike has taken on his duties with gusto and with candor. In fact, it would be easy to paint Mike as a Don Quixote-like figure: lost in his books, Mike does not realize that idealism has dimmed, and he suits up and wanders about NASA, righting old wrongs, questioning old verities and rescuing programs in distress.

But there's an essential difference between Administrator Griffin and the Man of LaMancha: the errors Mike is battling are real, and the results are consequential rather than comic.

Indeed, much is riding on Mike's tenure at NASA. Each and every NASA program is facing fundamental questions: what will the CEV look like and what will we do on the moon? What kind of aeronautics research will NASA pursue and at what facilities? Will NASA continue to have a robust earth science program? What is the future of the Hubble and Webb telescopes? What will be done about the Iran Non-Proliferation Act?

And those are just a few of the basic issues. In fact, more than two years after the President announced his Vision for Space Exploration, NASA can barely give a definitive answer to a single question about its programs.

That is not, believe it or not, a criticism of NASA. The agency is rethinking its activities, and the answers will take time. Moreover, Administrator Griffin, wisely, sent some of the teams working on the answers back to the drawing board. But it's important to remember that we are pretty much "flying blind" right now. We expect to have the first answers about the human space flight program some time in July.

And NASA will have to answer the most fundamental question about its current manned programs this week, when it determines whether to return the Shuttle to flight. As yesterday's Stafford-Covey deliberations indicated, that is a close question, and I am ready to abide by any decision Administrator Griffin makes.

But even as NASA wrestles with these thorny issues, Congress needs to move ahead with authorizing legislation. The bill that Chairman Calvert and I introduced yesterday provides a framework for moving forward, ensuring that Congress has the information it needs to make more detailed policy calls in the years ahead. I look forward to working with all the Members of this Committee as we move the bill forward to enactment over the next several months.

There are two matters on which the bill is crystal clear. First, that we should move ahead with returning to the moon by 2020, and second that human space flight programs cannot become the sole mission of the agency.

Figuring out how to balance those goals will be no easy task, but it is essential. Part of the answer is ensuring that the Shuttle is indeed retired no later than 2010.

But it will take more than that to ensure that NASA continues to have vibrant and productive aeronautics, earth science and space science programs – programs that are not evaluated in terms of the Vision, but on their own terms, for their own contributions. I look forward to working with Administrator Griffin, who also wants to see a balanced and multi-mission NASA.

And so I look forward to hearing Administrator Griffin's latest thoughts this morning. If things don't go well, he can just write us off as one more windmill he had to tilt with today.

Thank you.