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On March 12, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Subcommittee on Science, Space, and Competitiveness held a hearing to review the President's fiscal year (FY) 2016 budget request for NASA. The Honorable Charles Bolden, Administrator of NASA, answered senators' questions about the current and future focus of NASA and its missions.

Senator Cruz expressed a desire for NASA to focus on space exploration. Senator Cory Gardner (R-CO) echoed his sentiment. Bolden replied that NASA's missions are synergistic and multiple facets play into space exploration, including ground-based infrastructure and earth and solar sciences that would inform when and how space exploratory missions are launched. He explained that federal agencies rely on NASA for satellites and instrumentation and stated that NASA does not give opinions or make decisions but provides data.

Subcommittee Ranking Member Gary Peters (D-MI) and Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) spoke on the importance of balanced funding in NASA's budget. Senator Peters highlighted the importance of financing the Aeronautics Directorate and Senator Nelson stated his support for increasing funding for both Earth science and space exploration.

Bolden stated that under the current FY 2016 proposal, NASA would still be on track to extend the International Space Station (ISS) until 2024, and the U.S. would no longer be reliant on transportation to the ISS on the Russian Soyuz by 2017.

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