



FY2013 BUDGET BRIEFING BY BILL GERSTENMAIER, NASA AA FOR HUMAN EXPLORATION AND OPERATIONS

The following notes from a FY2013 budget briefing that took place via teleconference on February 13, 2012 originally appears as an article on SpacePolicyOnline.com on February 14 under the title [Gerstenmaier: Soyuz Launch Date May Advance, INKSNA Waiver Needed, Beyond LEO Destination TBD](#).

In addition to the top-line [messages](#) of the budget briefings by NASA officials yesterday regarding the FY2013 budget request, a number of other important points were made primarily as answers to questions from reporters. Here are some interesting tidbits from the teleconference with Bill Gerstenmaier, Associate Administrator for Human Exploration and Operations.

NASA is requesting money for purchasing transportation services to and from the International Space Station (ISS) after the current contract with Russia runs out in mid-2016, but is not yet choosing who would provide those services - Russia or U.S. commercial companies. In an earlier agency-level budget briefing, NASA Administrator Bolden had said that NASA expects commercial crew will be ready "no earlier than 2017." Gerstenmaier pointed out, however, that some of the U.S. commercial companies insist they might be ready sooner than that and thus NASA has not made a firm decision to buy more seats on Russian Soyuz spacecraft. Representatives of Boeing, Sierra Nevada and SpaceX [testified](#) to the House Science, Space and Technology Committee last fall that they could be ready by 2015 if there is adequate funding. Congress subsequently provided NASA with substantially less funding to support the commercial crew program, but, conceptually, private investors could come forward to make up the difference. Gerstenmaier said NASA will decide probably next spring as to who to contract with for those services.

Nonetheless, the Administration is planning to ask Congress this spring for another waiver to the Iran-North Korea-Syria-Nonproliferation Act (INKSNA) to allow it to continue to purchase ISS-related services from Russia after mid-2016. That is not necessarily an indication that NASA is skeptical that commercial crew will be ready by then, but Gerstenmaier said Russia provides other services that will be necessary throughout the life of the ISS, including analysis, systems engineering, and keeping the Functional Cargo Block (FGB) module "up to date." NASA paid Russia for the FGB (also known as Zarya) so it is U.S.-owned, but Russian-built. Launched in 1998, it was the first ISS module in orbit. Gerstenmaier had [indicated](#) at an October 2011 House committee hearing that a request for another INKSNA waiver was in the works.

Although Russia has been experiencing unexpected problems in its space program recently, Gerstenmaier indicated that he remains confident of Russia's ability to support ISS. In fact, he said, the next Soyuz launch may be moved up from its current May 15 launch date. The launch was scheduled for March 30, but had to be [postponed](#) after the Soyuz spacecraft that was to be launched was damaged during testing. Russia is replacing it with the next Soyuz that was in the manufacturing process and apparently may be able to get it ready earlier than expected. As for human spaceflight beyond low Earth orbit, Gerstenmaier confirmed plans to launch a test flight of the Orion capsule in 2014 and the first flight of NASA's Space Launch System in 2017 with an unoccupied Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle. But it will be four more years before there is a second SLS flight with an Orion carrying a crew. Gerstenmaier said that during that time Orion will be outfitted with the systems needed to support a crew, such as life support systems. When asked if money was the pacing item making it such a long wait, he replied yes.

He also was asked about why it was taking so long to choose the next destination for human spaceflight and whether landing on the Moon is "on or off the list." Gerstenmaier replied that a Moon landing is neither on nor off the list because the list is still being developed. NASA continues to conduct studies about what missions will be enabled by the capabilities it is building. Once that is done, a decision will have to be made about the destination. He noted, however, that a goal such as landing on the Moon would require funding to build a lander and it is not clear when such money would be available. "Those are the trades we need to make," he said.