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## **LARSON CALLS ON SCIENCE COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN TO HOLD HEARINGS ON SPACE SHUTTLE COLUMBIA**

WASHINGTON, D.C.- In a letter sent yesterday, U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) called on House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert to hold hearings on the Space Shuttle Columbia to help determine not only the cause of the failure, but also the broader questions that have arisen with regard to the long-term safety and future of the space shuttle program and manned space flight. The text of Larson's letter is as follows:

Dear Chairman Boehlert:

In this time of great tragedy for our nation's space program and mourning for the loss of its great heroes, I commend your appropriate and timely call for the House Science Committee to assert its oversight role and conduct an investigation into the events leading up to the sad loss of the Columbia Space Shuttle and the brave astronauts who gave their lives for the cause of scientific discovery.

While I fully support and commend NASA and the President for their response so far in activating an external "Space Shuttle Mishap Interagency Investigation Board" and naming Navy Admiral Harold W. Gehman, Jr. to chair it, I believe the questions surrounding the tragic events on Saturday, February 1, 2003 merit a broader examination-of not only the technical issues at fault, but also, the policy and funding questions that have arisen. This investigation should focus on a number of questions, among them, the following:

- Did NASA adequately respond to concerns expressed over the past several years by the Aerospace Safety Advisory Board Panel and others that the shuttle program was under stress

due to funding and workforce constraints?

- Should a replacement Shuttle orbiter be built? If not, should we 1) invest in developing significant crew survivability capabilities (e.g., a crew escape pod) and other safety improvements for the remaining three Shuttles, or 2) invest in the development of a new Orbital Space Plane that would just carry crews to the Space Station and focus on more limited safety upgrades for the existing Shuttles, or 3) attempt to accelerate the development of a completely reusable launch vehicle that could carry either crew or cargo depending on the mission with the goal of phasing out the existing Shuttle fleet as soon as possible?

- Do we have adequate plans for the continued support of the International Space Station and its crew in the event of an extended suspension of Shuttle flights? Will those plans require modification to the existing prohibitions in the Iran Nonproliferation Act against funding Russian Space Station activities?

- The Administration has advocated privatizing or "competitively outsourcing" the Space Shuttle. What would be the impact of such measures on Shuttle safety?

Again I commend your actions, and I stand beside you in support of this investigation and our nation's space program. It is because we deeply believe in this great American cause, of reaching for the stars and exploring the unknown, and because these great heroes gave their lives, just as others await their turn to do the same, in pursuit of these noble ambitions that we must answer these all of these questions as quickly and thoroughly as possible.

Sincerely,

S/ JOHN B. LARSON  
Member of Congress

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*Larson is a Member of the Science Committee and the Subcommittee on Space and  
Aerospace*