

March 4, 2004

Two Science Committee Bills Pass House

WASHINGTON, DC- The House of Representatives today approved legislation, supported by Science Committee member Representative Todd Akin (R-MO) and sponsored by Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Chairman Dana Rorabacher (R-CA), designed to promote the development of the emerging commercial human space flight industry. H.R. 3752, The Commercial Space Launch Amendments Act of 2004, would put in place a clear, balanced regulatory regime to promote the industry while ensuring public safety. The legislation now heads to the U.S. Senate.

"Private enterprise has long been the most powerful engine of innovation in America, and it is important to encourage entrepreneurship in the field of aerospace, in particular sub orbital rockets," said Congressman Todd Akin.

House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) said that, "This is about the future of the U.S. aerospace industry. As in most areas of American enterprise, the greatest innovations in aerospace are most likely to come from small entrepreneurs."

Major provisions of the legislation are designed to:

- eliminate any confusion about who should regulate flights of suborbital rockets carrying human beings by explicitly locating all commercial space flight authority under the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Office of Commercial Space Transportation (AST);
- make it easier to launch new types of reusable suborbital rockets by allowing AST to issue experimental permits that can be granted more quickly and with fewer requirements than licenses;
- extend government indemnification for the entire commercial space transportation industry (including licensed, non-experimental commercial human space launches) for a period of three years, but the bill will not grant indemnification for flights conducted under experimental permits, which will be more lightly regulated; and
- require a study on how best to gradually eliminate indemnification for the commercial space transportation industry by 2008 or as soon as possible thereafter.

On Wednesday, Representative Akin supported another science committee bill that passed the U.S. House of Representatives. H.R. 912, the Charles `Pete' Conrad Astronomy Awards Act establishes that two awards be granted annually to amateur astronomers who make significant discoveries regarding near earth asteroids. The awards would be made by NASA at the direction of the Smithsonian Minor Planet Center. The program is designed to encourage the cataloging of asteroids that may present a danger of colliding with Earth.