

Bill seeks to allow astronauts to keep space souvenirs

March 12 2012, By Richard Simon

A dispute between NASA and former astronauts over ownership of space artifacts has led to a bill in Congress that would give the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo astronauts "full ownership rights" to items such as checklists and personal logs from their missions.

The legislation grows out of an effort last year by Apollo 13 Commander Jim Lovell to sell a checklist he used in his 1970 mission - the one featured in the movie "Apollo 13," which starred Tom Hanks as Lovell. The checklist brought nearly \$390,000 at auction. But the sale was put on hold after the [National Aeronautics and Space Administration](#) demanded proof that the former astronaut owned the checklist.

"After 42 years, Apollo 13 still has a problem," Lovell joked on Fox News last month.

In 2010, NASA challenged [Apollo 14](#) astronaut Edgar Mitchell's attempt to sell a camera he took to the moon; Mitchell agreed to donate the camera to the Smithsonian's [National Air and Space Museum](#).

The bill stands a good chance of making it through Congress since it was introduced by Rep. Ralph Hall, R-Texas, chairman of the House Science, [Space](#) and Technology Committee, and the panel's top Democrat, Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson of Texas. The panel oversees NASA.

The bill's sponsors said in a letter to congressional colleagues that the

legislation would allow the "first generation of astronauts to retain spaceflight artifacts that have been in their possession ... in many cases for more than 40 years."

Under the measure, astronauts from the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs would be allowed to keep items such as personal logs and checklists - but not [moon rocks](#).

"These national heroes have had these items in their possession - with NASA's knowledge - for decades," said a committee spokesman. "And many of these items have been re-gifted to grandchildren, or donated to charities, schools, local museums."

NASA itself had no official policy on the issue until the shuttle era, the spokesman added.

NASA spokesman Bob Jacobs said, "We'll obviously support whatever comes out of the legislative process."

NASA Administrator Charles Bolden said last month after meeting with Lovell and some other former astronauts, "These are American heroes, fellow [astronauts](#) and personal friends who have acted in good faith, and we have committed to work together to find the right policy and legal paths forward to address outstanding ownership questions."

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