U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing
From Detection to Deflection: Evaluating NASA's Planetary Defense Strategy

May 15th, 2025

Good morning, and thank you Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing. I also want to thank our expert witnesses for being here.

During my tenure as a Member of the Science Committee, I have sat through occasional hearings the Committee has held on near-Earth objects – or NEOs—the risks that they could impact Earth, and NASA's progress in complying with statutory direction to detect, track, and characterize NEOs.

Today, I am less concerned about the low though consequential risk of a mammoth rock hitting Earth than I am about the long-term and devasting impacts of the proverbial rocks being thrown at our Federal workforce and the gutting of our science enterprise more broadly.

That said, planetary defense, as with many of the societal challenges that our S&T capabilities help address, is a multidisciplinary, interagency, and international endeavor. That is made clear in the 2023 National Science and Technology Council's "National Preparedness Strategy and Action Plan for Near-Earth Object Hazards and Planetary Defense", which was updated from a 2018 Strategy and Action Plan.

While NASA is designated as the lead on many of the Plan's actions, other agencies, including the NSF, DOE, the Department of Homeland Security's FEMA, and the Department of State are also named to lead on planetary defense actions in the Strategy and Action Plan.

For example, NSF is to lead on an interagency assessment to explore coordinated development of existing and future deep space radar facilities and how they may be useful for planetary defense.

DOE is named to lead on the study of circumstances when only use of a nuclear explosive device would provide the necessary capability to mitigate an impending NEO impact.

DHS's FEMA would lead on an impact risk data pipeline to inform decision makers on results from integrated modeling of potential impact threats.

The Department of State would lead on engaging and informing foreign governments of the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to preparing for a NEO event.

It is clear that planetary defense leverages many of our Federal S&T agencies. Whether that Federal agency expertise continues, however, is in question. Probationary employee layoffs, deferred resignations, and wide-spread planned RIFs are creating a brain drain.

Moreover, under the Trump Administration's FY2026 "skinny budget" proposal,

- NASA would see a 24% cut;
- NSF a 55% cut;
- DOE a 9% cut (with much steeper cuts to DOE's Office of Science);
- FEMA may not even exist; and
- The Department of State a 47% cut.

Will anyone be home to answer the call if a NEO were found to be on a trajectory headed toward Earth? Would any remaining Federal workers have the necessary skills or know-how to act?

I could go on, but I think the message is clear. I hope this Committee, as we have done on a bipartisan basis on countless issues, will roll up our sleeves together to reverse the dismantling of our S&T enterprise and reject the proposed cuts that pose long-term harm to this country. We owe it to Americans and to our grandchildren to ensure a safe, secure, and bright future full of opportunities for all.

Thank you, and I yield back.