



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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics Hearing:
Accelerating Deep Space Travel with Space Nuclear Propulsion

October 20, 2021

Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Beyer, for holding this hearing.

For decades, the space community has identified nuclear propulsion as a required and enabling technology for our human exploration goals.

Even the best chemical propulsion capabilities of today mean long travel times to and from Mars, and a long stay on the red planet for our astronaut crew.

Space nuclear propulsion is a capability that can help address the safety of our astronauts by reducing their exposure to in-space radiation with shorter trips. Reducing the length of time that the first crew stays on Mars would make the mission more feasible and likely to succeed.

We have talked about this technology for a long time. It has been the subject of many studies by NASA, the Department of Defense, and external advisory committees, including one led by retired Air Force Lieutenant General Tom Stafford in 1991.

I want to know what we need to do to move from studies and talk to meaningful progress.

Whether it's R&D investment, developing safety standards, or building a STEM pipeline in nuclear expertise, I hope our expert witnesses can identify the necessary actions for advancing space nuclear propulsion, and doing so safely.

This capability will help our nation lead the inspiring and ambitious effort of sending humans to Mars. Further, it will keep the United States and our industry partners at the cutting edge of nuclear research, development, and applications.

I look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses this morning on the state of the technology and what we need to do to move it forward.

Thank you, and I yield back.

