

OPENING STATEMENT  
**Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)**

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
Subcommittee on Space  
*“An Update on NASA Exploration Systems Development”*  
November 9, 2017

Good morning. Welcome to our panelists and thank you for your service. I look forward to your testimony on the status of NASA’s Exploration Systems Development programs, namely the Space Launch System—or SLS—the Orion crew vehicle, and the Exploration Ground Systems.

Mr. Chairman, earlier this year, the Congress passed and the President signed the NASA Transition Authorization Act of 2017. Among other things, the Act gives clear direction that NASA manage human space flight programs, including the SLS and Orion “to enable humans to explore Mars and other destinations”. It is important that we keep our eye on that goal. It will require focus, commitment, stable funding, and support over several Congresses and Administrations. It is why we are here today.

We cannot get to Mars without a heavy-lift rocket, a crew vehicle that can transport our astronauts to deep space and return them safely, and a ground infrastructure that can support the multiple launches that will be needed to meet the Mars goal. I look forward to hearing about what steps NASA is taking to develop innovative and efficient manufacturing processes that will establish an affordable and sustainable capability for human exploration of deep space for the decades ahead. While progress towards the initial test flights of SLS and Orion is critical towards meeting the eventual Mars goal, we must ensure that safety remains at the forefront.

Trying to meet deadlines at the cost of compromising long-term safety practices will not advance a sustainable program. We learned that hard lesson after the Challenger and Columbia accidents, and I know that NASA will not knowingly do anything that could compromise safety in its exploration program. Nor can we allow the fits and starts caused by lack of stability in funding or changes in goals and directions. That is why, Mr. Chairman, we must ensure a “constancy of purpose” as recommended by the Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel. I hope, as the ASAP has encouraged, that we can do so in partnership with the Administration. We need to be on the same page.

The Human Exploration Roadmap that the NASA Transition Act directed NASA to develop is due to this Committee by December 1, 2017. I hope, Mr. Chairman, that this Committee will hold hearings to review the Roadmap, and to consider the implications of the Vice President’s proposal to send humans to the lunar surface, in the context of that plan.

Thank you, and I yield back.