

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Donna F. Edwards (D-MD)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Space
“Charting a Course: Expert Perspectives on Human Exploration Proposals”
February 3, 2016

Good morning, and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses. I want to thank Chairman Babin for calling this hearing titled *“Charting a Course: Expert Perspectives on Human Exploration Proposals”*.

This is my passion. Each time we hold hearings on sending humans to Mars, my colleagues and I don’t just exit the room and leave the subject behind. Instead, we leave with increased determination to help find a way to get there as soon as is safely possible. I want the American people to share our excitement and desire to send human explorers farther into space than ever before.

This Committee’s inquiries during recent hearings have focused on the need for a clearly articulated plan and next steps, such as the Human Exploration Roadmap that the bipartisan, House-passed NASA Authorization Act of 2015 directs NASA to develop. I recognize that this is not an easy task given previous flat funding levels, uncertainty over future budgets, and the need to allow flexibility in planning a multi-decadal endeavor. I also acknowledge that NASA has established a strategy for achieving the goal and an Evolvable Mars Campaign that will allow for flexibility in its decisions and that can take advantage of new knowledge and advances in technology.

But facets of that strategy are not detailed enough to inform mission planning and sequencing. That strategy cannot answer questions about whether going to the lunar surface or an asteroid is needed to reduce risk before sending humans to Mars. Nor does it allow us to assess whether NASA’s approach achieves the right balance of flexibility and definition.

The Congressionally-mandated National Academies report, *Pathways to Exploration*, recommends that NASA follow a pathway—a specific sequence of intermediate accomplishments and destinations that advance the technologies needed to reach the horizon goal, which they conclude is Mars.

The NASA Advisory Council in its December 3rd 2015 recommendations to the Administrator said they were pleased that NASA was providing new information about its human exploration architecture. However, they also recommended that *“In preparation for the 2017 transition of Administrations...NASA further develop their plan for future Human Exploration”* because of the importance of defining a baseline architecture and plan that encompasses the entire human exploration program.

Mr. Chairman, I’m confident that a plan of sufficient detail can come to fruition, but we don’t have time to spare if we are to sustain such a challenging endeavor across the upcoming Presidential transition. Without agreement on the substance of a plan, the path forward is less clear and the sustainability of progress toward the Mars goal is left vulnerable to rehashing of interim destinations or even redirection. And, make no mistake, we need to do our jobs in providing NASA with the necessary resources and budgetary stability to carry out such a plan. The Congress’s recent increase in appropriations for Fiscal Year 2016 for NASA’s exploration systems is a good start, but they need to be sustained.

Well, Mr. Chairman, we have a lot to discuss this morning, and I look forward to our witness' testimony. Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.