

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

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Research and Technology
Subcommittee on Space

“The Great American Eclipse: To Totality and Beyond”
September 28, 2017

Thank you, Chairwoman Comstock and Chairman Babin for holding this hearing, and thank you to all of the witnesses for being here today.

Before I start my formal remarks, I just want to say that our thoughts are with our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands as they attempt to deal with devastating damage caused by hurricane Maria. We all hope for a swift recovery effort. As Ranking Member of the Science Committee, the Arecibo observatory and the safety of its staff are also on my mind and I hope it will soon be back online.

This morning we are here to talk about something much more lighthearted. Last month the entire country was treated to the sight of a solar eclipse. While most Americans experienced a partial eclipse, millions were fortunate enough to live in or travel to the path of totality to see the Moon completely block out the light from the Sun. The eclipse affected people in different ways depending on their worldview, their background, and their stage in life. For some, the eclipse was a thing of beauty, a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see the faint, feathery corona with their own eyes. For others, the eclipse was a chance to make some extra money. States in the path of totality saw a boost to their economies through tourism; many residents in the path of totality rented out their homes to eclipse watchers; and small businesses held eclipse-themed promotions. Many teachers and parents saw the eclipse as an educational opportunity to teach children about the solar system, and scientists used the eclipse to get data that are otherwise out of reach.

Perhaps the most important impact of the eclipse was the chance it gave us to come together for a shared experience. Some people viewed the eclipse with family and friends, some went outside in the middle of the workday with their co-workers, and others gathered with strangers for an organized viewing event. In a time when Americans are deeply divided on a host of issues, the eclipse brought us together and helped us rise above our differences to experience the beauty of nature and the wonder of science together. The value of that cannot be overstated.

I look forward to hearing from our panel about the value the eclipse has for science, for public engagement with science, for education, and for bringing people together. I yield balance of my time.