Opening Statement

Hon. Eddie Bernice Johnsons [D-TX]

Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

"*Next Steps in Human Exploration to Mars and Beyond*"

May 21, 2013

Good afternoon. I would like to join the Chairman and Ranking Member Edwards in welcoming our witnesses to today's hearing. It is a distinguished group of experts, and I look forward to their testimony.

The topic of this hearing is an important one, as it touches directly on the future direction of the nation's human exploration program. I expect that it will be a lively discussion, and that is as it should be, because that is just further evidence that NASA's space exploration activities, both human and robotic, matter—and thus are worth arguing about.

As my colleagues know, I have long been a supporter of human space exploration. It pushes technological innovation, advances our understanding of the universe, challenges our best and brightest, and inspires millions of our young people. It also is a very visible symbol of our commitment to the peaceful use of outer space. In fact, it's not an exaggeration to say that NASA and its programs provide one of the most positive images of America abroad that we could hope for.

Yet it is evident that despite clear policy direction in successive NASA Authorization Acts, NASA's human exploration program still has an air of tentativeness about it. For example, the International Space Station, which I strongly support, is currently the linchpin of our human spaceflight program. However, we still lack a clear picture of the ways it will be used to advance the nation's exploration goals. In addition, the Space Launch System and Orion crew vehicle are the transportation systems that will be needed for whichever path we take in our human exploration program. Yet, they currently are being funded at levels significantly below their authorized budgets, and are being forced to make progress under a funding profile that is anything but typical for challenging development programs. If they are essential to the success of the exploration program, then their priority should be reflected in the resources they are given.

Finally, of course, if our nation's exploration program is to succeed, we need to have a clear roadmap to follow. That too is lacking at present.

Mr. Chairman, we can criticize NASA. We can criticize the current or the previous Administration. The reality is we also need to look at our own actions. I believe that many of our colleagues see the benefits, both tangible and intangible, that we have reaped from our past investments in NASA. And successive Congresses have directed NASA to undertake an exciting and inspiring initiative of human exploration of our solar system, with Mars as an obvious and challenging goal. That is as it should be—it is a goal worthy of a great nation, and one that will lead to good things for our country, even if its attainment winds up taking longer than some of us would like. Yet, at the same time we appear to be unwilling to make the investments that NASA

will need for us to make if it is to succeed. And we are even failing to deliver the funding that we *do* provide on any kind of predictable basis.

That is unfair to the hardworking women and men of NASA and its contractor team. And it unduly increases risk and winds up costing us more down the road. Yet I'm afraid that we seem poised to repeat that pattern again as we consider this year's authorization and appropriation for NASA. We have just forced NASA to take a significant cut to its Fiscal Year 2013 budget as a result of sequestration, and some in the House seem prepared to extend those cuts into FY 14 and beyond. If Congress actually carries through with such short-sighted cuts, it will make all of the earnest protestations of support for exploration that we may hear today sound very empty indeed. I hope that as we prepare to move forward with our NASA reauthorization this Committee, at least, will make sure that NASA has the resources it will need to carry out the very challenging tasks that this nation given it.