

**Opening Statement**  
**Ranking Member Donna F. Edwards**  
Subcommittee on Space  
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

*“Next Steps in Human Exploration to Mars and Beyond”*

May 21, 2013

Good afternoon and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for calling this hearing today on *“Next Steps in Human Exploration to Mars and Beyond”*.

The hearings this Subcommittee and the Full Committee have recently held on near Earth objects and exoplanets, as well as previous hearings held on Mars and planetary science, have only deepened my enthusiasm for what NASA does and wetted my appetite for the places that our astronauts might explore.

Human exploration is indeed a big part of NASA and its inspiring mission.

It’s also an important catalyst for advancing our nation’s innovation agenda and for demanding the types of skills and educated workforce that contribute to our nation’s economic strength. I want to ensure that others share in my excitement and one day experience the thrill of American astronauts traveling to and exploring a surface far beyond our Earth, and then returning safely home.

That is something that the United States of America has not done in four decades, and I don’t want another four decades to pass before we explore deep space again.

That’s why I’m delighted to hear the NASA Administrator, Charles Bolden, speaking more often about Mars as the ultimate destination for human space exploration.

Today’s hearing will examine potential interim steps en route to that ultimate destination.

Successive NASA Authorizations Acts have authorized a “stepping stone approach” to human exploration. The Moon, near Earth asteroids, and Lagrangian points are among the destinations that can be considered to help prepare for eventual human exploration of Mars.

The Administration’s recent proposal to capture a near Earth asteroid, bring it into trans-lunar orbit, and to potentially send humans there is yet another possible step. But before we look at interim steps, we need first to understand what it takes to get to Mars.

Learning how to deal with extended space travel, protecting ourselves from harmful radiation, and surviving on another planet are a few challenges that come to mind.

Is there a plan to get there and to address these and other challenges?

What should Congress expect to be included in a credible and measured roadmap to achieve the goal of sending humans to Mars?

Such a guide can help us determine whether one or more interim steps makes sense, how an interim destination moves us forward along the roadmap, and which destination or destinations are most effective in enabling progress toward a Mars goal.

We have an impressive group of witnesses here today with deep expertise in the issues we are discussing, so thank you for joining us and I look forward to your testimony.