



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

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## Opening Statement

**Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)**

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing:

*“Advancing Scientific Discovery: Assessing the Status of NASA’s Science Mission Directorate”*

March 21, 2024

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Babin and Ranking Member Sorensen, for holding today’s hearing. I also want to welcome our witnesses. We have an incredibly distinguished panel who are very familiar to this Committee and have been the source of much excellent advice in the past, and I am sure today will be no different.

While NASA’s science portfolio and budget have enjoyed increases in the recent past, NASA’s science programs are facing a perfect storm. The recently enacted appropriations cut NASA’s budget, and NASA’s science portfolio took an outsized share of the decrease. The guidelines set under the debt ceiling agreement limit further funding growth. Cost and schedule growth on existing projects exacerbate the constraints. The building pressures on the portfolio leave less and less flexibility to accommodate the unexpected and no room for new decadal survey science to get underway. NASA has already had to take the difficult step to delay important missions under development, even ones that are performing well. The FY2025 budget request that Congress just received proposes more delays, descopes, and cancellations, and not just to new missions under development, but to active missions, including to a high-performing Great Observatory.

These decisions are hard, and they have real consequences. NASA’s science missions and programs also support an entire ecosystem of scientists, engineers, technicians, professors, students, science communicators, and more. Skilled talent, once lost, may not be easily regained. We must consider the value of ensuring continuity of critical skills and talent. In addition, we mustn’t forget that NASA science is much more than the probes we send into space. It’s also the advanced technology, the innovative scientific ideas generated under the research and analysis programs, the theoretical research, the analysis programs that turn mission data into scientific results, and the supporting infrastructure necessary to enable the inspiring and ambitious work that NASA Science Mission Directorate carries out.

We in Congress, and particularly in this Committee, have an important oversight responsibility here. We need to ask hard questions about cost, management, credibility, and scientific return on investment. And NASA needs to give us substantive answers.

But I hope today that we can also talk about how to keep NASA Science whole as we navigate these issues.

Because we need to ensure that we do not lose sight of the big picture. We, as a nation, make the investment in fundamental space and Earth science at NASA because we know the inherent value in doing so. The missions and programs of NASA's Science Mission Directorate are based on the highest-priority science questions identified in the consensus-based decadal survey processes. They help us learn about the fundamental nature, origins, and evolution of the Earth, Sun, solar system, and universe, and how humanity fits into all of it.

We must preserve and bolster NASA's ability to keep developing the ambitious missions, sustain supporting research capabilities, and pursuing the highest-priority decadal survey science while also finding ways to improve cost and schedule performance and transparency, particularly of the largest missions. It is critical that we get this right.

Thank you, and I yield back.