

OPENING STATEMENT

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Subcommittee on Space
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Deep Space Exploration: The Impact of the President’s Budget”
Space Subcommittee Hearing

October 9, 2015

Good morning. I’d like to welcome back our two witnesses, Mr. Dumbacher and Mr. Cooke. I say “back” because both of you have appeared before our Subcommittee previously, as former leaders of NASA’s human exploration programs. I appreciate your past public service as well as your willingness to testify today.

Mr. Chairman, last December, millions of people in America and around the world tasted the future when NASA conducted the Exploration Flight Test—EFT-1— in which the Orion crew vehicle traveled farther into space than any human spaceflight vehicle since the Apollo era. That future is an exciting one that includes sending humans to the surface of Mars.

Mars is the goal that we established in our bipartisan House-passed NASA Authorization Act of 2015. And it’s the consensus goal for human space exploration of a distinguished National Academies panel that recently examined U.S. human space exploration. So, it’s fitting, Mr. Chairman, that we follow-up on our Subcommittee’s review of the Space Launch System and Orion crew vehicle programs that was held last December, just after the EFT-1 flight test, and see where these programs stand now.

By any measure, the progress on SLS and Orion is visible and tangible. NASA and its contractors deserve credit for the many accomplishments achieved to date. Tests of the SLS solid rocket booster engines and the RS-25 main engine are reviving and modernizing the propulsion activities that brought us through the successful Shuttle era. Elements of the Orion crew vehicle that will return American astronauts to deep space are being fabricated as I speak. And just a few weeks ago, the Orion program was approved to transition from formulation into development, a major milestone known as Key Decision Point C or KDP-C.

This hearing should provide an opportunity to discuss the outcomes of the Orion KDP-C review and clarify any questions, including the perception, by some, of a two-year “slip” to the first crewed flight test known as Exploration Mission-2 or EM-2.

However, I would note that the members of the panel were not involved in this recent Orion KDP-C review. Only NASA can address questions regarding the KDP-C milestone, discuss the breadth of accomplishments achieved to date, and inform us of the challenges going forward. That is why I was puzzled, Mr. Chairman, that NASA was not initially invited to testify, and why I extended an invitation to the Associate Administrator of NASA’s Human Exploration and Operations Mission Directorate to serve as a witness. Unfortunately, the

Associate Administrator's international travel schedule precluded his ability to appear this morning.

So, I hope, Mr. Chairman, that we will give NASA the opportunity in another hearing to provide the details on the SLS and Orion programs that this Subcommittee needs to hear. Because ensuring that SLS and Orion make maximum progress, especially in this environment of budgetary uncertainty, is a job for both the Administration and Congress. And as the National Academies report reminds us, achieving the goals for sending humans to deep space requires a joint commitment on the part of Congress and the Administration.

Mars is a goal worthy of this great nation and I look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, to enable NASA's continued progress toward that goal.

Thank you, and I yield back.