

OPENING STATEMENT

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Subcommittee on Space
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“An Update on the Space Launch System and Orion: Monitoring the Development of the Nation’s Deep Space Exploration Capabilities”
Space Subcommittee Hearing

December 10, 2014

Good morning and welcome to our witnesses. First, I want to join Chairman Palazzo in congratulating NASA, Lockheed Martin, United Launch Alliance, and the entire government and contractor team on successfully conducting the Exploration Flight Test—EFT-1—of the Orion capsule last week.

The flight subjected Orion and its systems to the rigors of outer space beyond low Earth orbit to test key systems, verify the Orion design, reduce technical risks, and test recoverability operations.

Mr. Chairman, this test flight shows Americans that tangible progress is being made on returning humans to exploration beyond our Earth’s neighborhood, a goal that this Committee and the Congress as a whole have embraced through multiple NASA Authorization Acts.

The development of the Space Launch System—SLS—and the Orion crew vehicle are necessary next steps in reaching our goals for human space exploration, including the long-term goal of sending humans to the surface of Mars as stated in our bipartisan House-passed NASA Authorization Act of 2014. So I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing to obtain an update on the status of the SLS and Orion programs.

It was only three years ago that we sat in this room pressing NASA for a decision on a final design for the SLS rocket, and today we’ll hear of the program’s approval to enter into full scale development. That’s a significant accomplishment, even in the midst of major challenges, especially those related to constrained budgets.

Congress has been supportive of SLS and Orion and has appropriated funding above the President’s requests. However, the programs have been challenged by the flat funding levels provided for SLS and Orion over the past years, a situation that departs significantly from the typical funding growth profiles of major development programs.

That’s why we recognized the critical need to authorize a robust top-line funding level for NASA in the 2013 Democratic NASA Authorization bill that included healthy increases for the exploration program.

The National Academies committee that recently released its report on human space exploration also recognized that sending humans to the surface of Mars would require sustained increases. They said, *“Increasing NASA’s budget to allow increasing the human spaceflight budget by 5 percent per year would enable pathways with potentially viable mission rates, greatly reducing technical, cost, and schedule risk.”*

Mr. Chairman, we can work together to overcome these challenges. As we work to reauthorize NASA during the next Congress, I look forward to working with you to ensure that this Committee authorizes the appropriations that the SLS and Orion programs require to achieve the expeditious development and

testing of these vehicles for their use at the earliest possible date, and that we obtain a human exploration roadmap to focus the SLS and Orion systems on long-term mission goals.

Because, when I see the excitement of the EFT-1 test flight as demonstrated by the flight's coverage as a leading media story, I'm reminded that the SLS and Orion programs belong to the American public. We need to honor their thirst for exploration.

And, finally, though the 113th Congress is rapidly drawing to a close, I encourage our colleagues in the Senate to seek quick passage of the House-passed 2014 NASA Authorization Act so that NASA and its industry contractors have the direction and stability needed to plan for continued progress. Thank you and I yield back.