

OPENING STATEMENT

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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Exploration of the Solar System: From Mercury to Pluto and Beyond
Full Committee Hearing

July 28, 2015

Good morning. We have a distinguished panel of witnesses presenting testimony to the Committee this morning, and I want to welcome each of them to this hearing.

NASA's solar system exploration program has been very much in the news in recent days, especially as a result of the amazing flyby of Pluto that has already returned some stunning images of that faraway body. Those images have fascinated the public, and I know that there will more such photos sent back by the New Horizons spacecraft over the coming days and months. I look forward to seeing them.

However, the mission to Pluto is just one of the exciting missions of discovery that NASA has undertaken to better understand our solar system and our place in it. Whether it is rovers on Mars, orbiters around Mercury and Saturn, or a spacecraft voyaging to multiple destinations in the Asteroid Belt, those missions remind us that we truly are in a golden age of solar system exploration.

Yet, while I am proud of the preeminent role the United States has taken in solar system exploration, we are not alone in that quest. And in that regard, I am pleased that international cooperation in this area has been long standing and highly productive. For example, we have cooperated with Europe on a number of challenging missions, including the Cassini-Huygens mission to Saturn and more recently the European Rosetta mission to a comet, for which the United States contributed a number of instruments. And we have worked with other nations as well on other missions.

Mr. Chairman, it is not an overstatement to say that NASA's planetary science program has been extraordinarily successful, and that fact is a tribute to the hard work and perseverance of NASA, its contractors, and the space research community. Yet, Congress also has a role to play in keeping NASA's solar system exploration program robust—namely, we need to do our part by making sure NASA receives adequate and timely funding to support the development and operation of those challenging missions. And we need to make sure we are also providing the

funding needed to develop the advanced technologies that will enable the future missions that will continue to rewrite the science textbooks.

Well, we have much to discuss today, and thus I will yield back so that we can hear from our witnesses. Thank you.