OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

"Searching for the Origins of the Universe:
An Update on the Progress of the James Webb Space Telescope"
Space Subcommittee Hearing

March 24, 2015

Good morning. I want to join Chairman Palazzo and Ranking Member Edwards in welcoming our witnesses. I look forward to hearing from each of you today.

We are here to discuss the James Webb Space Telescope—JWST—which is scheduled to launch in October of 2018. This morning's hearing is not the first this Committee has held on JWST. We held a hearing in December 2011after the project was replanned following an independent review that found significant cost and schedule growth. Today we will hear how well NASA and its main industry partner, Northrop Grumman, are sticking to that plan. And given the complexity involved in building and testing a telescope of JWST's magnitude, it should come as no surprise that we will also hear of the many challenges that need to be addressed before the project is completed. I hope we can be assured today that NASA and its partners are taking all necessary steps to keep JWST on track.

We need to provide the necessary Congressional funding to ensure this project gets completed on time and on budget, consistent with the National Academies' decadal survey that ranked this telescope as the top priority for space-based astrophysics over a decade ago. I am pleased that Dr. Mather, the 2006 Nobel Laureate in physics, is here today to tell us about the transformational science that JWST will carry out, including making observations that will teach us about how galaxies, stars and planets formed—the very roots of our Universe. I also hope to hear about JWST's capabilities for studying extrasolar planets for clues that could signal the potential for life there. The nation has taken on an impressive challenge in developing, building, and completing JWST, and we need to be good stewards of our taxpayers' investment in this project.

That said, I have no doubt that JWST's discoveries will rewrite the astronomy textbooks, just as the Hubble's science has already done. I can't imagine a better legacy. Because somewhere in a backyard, on a school playground, or in a bedroom with an open window on a dark starry night, there's a child who wonders what the Universe is all about, and JWST's observations will feed that child's imagination and hunger for knowledge.

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.