

OPENING STATEMENT

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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Full Committee Hearing
“Pathways to Exploration: A Review of the Future of Human Space Exploration”

June 25, 2014

Good morning. I want to join the Chairman in welcoming our two distinguished witnesses to today’s hearing.

I make no secret of the fact that I consider the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to be a critical national asset. NASA is a source of technological and scientific innovation, an inspiration to generations of young people, a catalyst for economic growth, and a very positive symbol of American preeminence worldwide as well as a visible demonstration of our commitment to international cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space. Simply put, NASA is about the future.

Now it is a fact that NASA’s human spaceflight activities account for a significant share of the resources invested in NASA. We need to ensure that those resources are invested wisely. That is why this morning’s hearing is so important. At Congress’s direction, the National Academies undertook a comprehensive review of the future of human space exploration in the United States. That review has been completed, and it is now up to Congress and the Administration to decide what we will do in response to the findings and recommendations contained in its final report.

This is a report that does not mince words, and for that we should be grateful. As I said when the report was first released, the National Academies has provided the nation with an important “wake-up call”. Their conclusions are clear. We are not going to have a human space exploration program worthy of this great nation if we continue down the current path of failing to provide the resources needed to make real progress and failing to embrace a clear goal and pathway to achieving that goal.

As Members of Congress, the ball is now in our court, and we have choices to make. We can choose to continue to argue about which President or who in Congress is to blame for the current state of our human space exploration program, but I earnestly hope that we won’t. We are where we are, and we can’t change the past. Our focus needs to be on how we proceed from this point forward, and I hope that our witnesses can provide some useful counsel to us in that regard.

In addition, we can choose to continue to pretend that a “business-as-usual” approach to our human space exploration program will suffice, but I hope we won’t do that either. Because the report we are reviewing today makes clear that “business-as-usual” is not a sustainable approach. Whatever resources we are able to invest need to be invested effectively and efficiently towards the attainment of a clearly articulated goal. We really can’t afford to do otherwise.

Finally, the National Academies panel makes clear that we don't have unlimited time to decide what kind of human space exploration program we want for the nation. It may be tempting for some to say that we shouldn't invest the necessary resources in space exploration until we first "fix" Medicare, eliminate the deficit, or address a host of other major policy issues that have been identified by Members at various times. It's tempting to use those issues as an excuse for inaction, but the National Academies makes a compelling case that we don't have that luxury if we want to maintain a meaningful human space exploration capability in this nation, which I strongly believe we do.

We should of course address those other issues, but that should not prevent us from investing in our future in the meantime. And make no mistake about it—our nation's human space exploration program, with an ultimate goal of landing humans on Mars, is about our future and that of our children and grandchildren.

Mr. Chairman, the National Academies has done us a great service by undertaking the study that we will be hearing about today. I hope that this morning's hearing will be the first step in achieving a revitalized and focused space exploration program for America, and I want to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to do just that.

In closing, I again want to welcome our witnesses, and I yield back the balance of my time.