

Statement of
Congresswoman Donna F. Edwards
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
*“Threats from Space: A Review of U.S. Government Efforts to Track and Mitigate Asteroids and
Meteoroids, Part I”*

March 19, 2013

Thank you, Ranking Member Johnson.

It should be noted that this hearing is Part 1 of the Committee’s examination of activities related to near-Earth objects (NEOs). Subcommittee Chairman Palazzo and I will hold Part 2 in early April.

It is fitting that this Committee is considering U.S. government agency roles and responsibilities in NEO detection, tracking, and mitigation, not only because of the recent events, but because this Committee has been at the forefront in setting the U.S. policy on NEOs for the past two decades.

The Committee’s focus, beginning in the 1990s, has led to NASA’s establishment of a system for detection and tracking of large NEOs, such as the 2012 DA14 asteroid. And it was this Committee that formulated the provisions in the 2008 NASA Authorization that called for the Office of Science and Technology Policy to develop policies on emergency response and to recommend a lead agency (or agencies) for protecting the United States from a NEO that is expected to collide with Earth and, if necessary, for implementing a deflection campaign, in consultation with international bodies.

As we will hear today from Dr. Holdren, NASA has a key role.

That should not come as a surprise. NASA’s combined scientific, technical, and engineering capability is absolutely essential to informing critical decisions on mitigation of a potentially hazardous object. This dependence on NASA, who we always seem to call for 911 assistance in all space matters, is in stark contrast to the across-the-board sequester cuts to NASA’s programs that are now law.

Mr. Chairman, I am struck with how complex this planetary protection issue is and how much farther we need to go. That is why Congress needs to ensure continued investment in and attention to efforts that will address the potential threats of near-Earth objects.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished group of panelists on the priorities for Congress going forward.