

**OPENING STATEMENT**  
**The Honorable Ralph M. Hall (R-TX), Chairman,**  
**U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology**  
*The Next Great Observatory: Assessing the James Webb Space Telescope*

December 6, 2011

Good afternoon. I'd like to thank our witnesses for taking time from their busy schedules to appear before our Committee to discuss the James Webb Space Telescope. I realize considerable effort goes into the drafting and writing of statements, and I want you to know that your testimony, wisdom, and experience will be of invaluable help to our Committee and Congress as we deliberate in the months ahead on issues related to NASA and its portfolio of programs.

The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) has been identified by the astrophysics community as its top priority program since 2001, and just recently NASA itself named JWST as an agency priority. The telescope would far surpass in size, power, and capability any previous space-based observatory launched by NASA and will enable new observations into the deepest corners of our universe, and I suspect it will be at least a generation or two before a successor mission is even contemplated. The potential new knowledge that will be returned is, in my mind, difficult to imagine. While observatories are designed and built to answer one set of questions, the record is replete of discoveries that even the builders of telescopes never contemplated.

But that's not why we are here this morning. Sadly, the James Webb Space Telescope is another case-study of NASA's mis-management of a flagship mission where original cost and schedule estimates are grossly under-stated, project execution is a litany of missed signals and deferred work, and senior agency oversight is invoked only after the project files breach reports. The resulting disruptions and breakage do tremendous collateral damage to other agency programs and missions as management struggles to find the resources to return JWST to a sound footing.

Not too many years ago, NASA's stakeholder community would not be overly surprised with cost and schedule slippages. It seemed to be an accepted way of life that technically challenging missions were expected to exceed original estimates, but Congress' tolerance for these types of over-runs has run out.

I support the James Webb Space Telescope. The science enabled by this mission will be extraordinary. But given Congress' and the White House's struggles to bring our federal budget under control, there are Members who will have a tough time continuing to vote for a program that requires another infusion of over a billion dollars. Some have argued that we should cut our losses and move on; others have suggested that we're rewarding bad behavior by continuing to invest in the mission.

In my view, NASA's latest replan for the James Webb Space Telescope is the agency's last opportunity to hold this program together. I am anxious to hear from our witnesses about their assessment of the steps taken by the agency to ensure high confidence in the cost and schedule estimates going forward, and in the project's new management structure. I am also anxious to hear about the biggest challenges still confronting the program.

Mr. Howard, don't take this personally, but I want the record to note that NASA's testimony was provided to our committee late yesterday afternoon, contrary to committee rules and past practice. By holding back testimony, Members and staff are afforded only a handful of hours to review and analyze administration statements, undermining the ability of this body to engage in a well-informed dialogue with executive branch witnesses. The White House's process for vetting testimony of agency witnesses continues to frustrate this committee and Congress. This is not the first time testimony has arrived only hours before the scheduled start of hearings, and I urge the White House to exercise greater diligence.