

Opening Statement

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Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

*“Mars Flyby 2021: The First Deep Space Mission for the Orion
and Space Launch System?”*

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Good morning. I want to join the Chairman in welcoming our witnesses to today’s hearing. I look forward to your testimony.

I see that the hearing title asks the question: “Mars Flyby 2021: The First Deep Space Mission for the Orion and Space Launch System?” Given that 2021 is currently the estimated date for the *very first* crewed mission of Orion, period—not just its first *deep space* mission—I would guess that the likely answer will turn out to be “no”. I doubt that a flyby of Mars will ultimately be considered to be an appropriate first “shakedown” flight for the new crewed spacecraft given the risks involved in a year and a half trip to Mars and back.

However, I think this hearing does provide a good opportunity to again stress that we need a clear, thoughtful roadmap for our Nation’s human exploration program. Successive NASA Authorization Acts have made clear that Congress believes that Mars is an appropriate goal for our Nation’s human spaceflight activities. It’s time for NASA to tell us *how* they intend to achieve that goal. What technologies will be needed, what sequence of intermediate destinations should be pursued and why, and what are the risks that will need to be addressed?

We also need to hear from NASA about the progress being made on the Space Launch System and on Orion, the two systems that are critical to our exploration efforts beyond low Earth orbit. What are the challenges they are facing, how will they be used to support NASA’s roadmap to Mars, and are they being adequately funded to meet the milestones laid out for those two programs?

Mr. Chairman, NASA was not invited to participate in today’s hearing. That is unfortunate. I would urge you to schedule a follow-on hearing with NASA so that we can get a status report on the Space Launch System and Orion, as well as hear what NASA is doing to develop a strategic roadmap for human Mars exploration. We need to hear from NASA if we are to properly assess its human exploration program and the funding that will be proposed for it when the President submits his budget request to Congress next week.

It will also be relevant for this Committee as we move forward on our reauthorization of NASA. Our Nation’s human exploration program can inspire our youth, advance our technological capabilities, and support our geopolitical objectives. However, it can only do those

things if we are willing to keep our commitment to the dedicated men and women at NASA and elsewhere who are working hard to carry out the challenging tasks we ask them to undertake. As a National Academies' panel has observed:

“There is a significant mismatch between the programs to which NASA is committed and the budgets that have been provided or anticipated. The approach to and pace of a number of NASA’s programs, projects, and activities will not be sustainable if the NASA budget remains flat, as currently projected. This mismatch needs to be addressed if NASA is to efficiently and effectively develop enduring strategic directions of any sort.”

The long-term goal of humans to Mars—if properly pursued and supported—will inspire, will spur innovation, will promote international cooperation, and will advance science. In short, it is a goal well worth investing in.

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