

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



For Immediate Release
May 9, 2013

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**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Hearing on “Exoplanet Discoveries: Have We Found Other Earths?”**

Chairman Smith: Thank you Chairman Palazzo and Chairman Bucshon for holding this hearing. I also want to thank the witnesses for being here to share their expertise on this topic.

Space exploration is an investment in our nation’s future—often the distant future. It encourages innovation and improves Americans' quality of life. I don't know if space is the final frontier, but I believe it is the next frontier.

The search for exoplanets and Earth-like planets is a relatively new but inspiring area of space exploration. Scientists are discovering new kinds of solar systems in our own galaxy that we never knew existed.

The discovery of Earth-like planets will open up new opportunities for American astronomers and explorers. Some experts predict that many more planets will be detected soon. And some of these planets could even contain the first evidence of organic life outside of Earth.

Imagine how the discovery of life outside our solar system would alter our priorities for space exploration and how we view our place in the universe.

Today we will hear where we are in our search. And what comes next in our study of these newly discovered planets. The U.S. already has undertaken a number of initiatives.

Cooperation between NASA’s space-based telescopes, like the Kepler mission, and ground-based telescopes funded in part by the National Science Foundation (NSF), has enabled astronomers to expand their star gazing capabilities. Also, next year construction will begin on the new NSF funded Large Synoptic Survey Telescope in Chile.

In addition to its many other capabilities, this telescope will essentially take a 10-year time lapse photo of the universe. The data collected from the telescope will help astronomers confirm the existence and types of exoplanets in our solar system.

The James Webb Space Telescope will use both transit spectroscopy and direct imaging to determine the make-up of exoplanet systems in our galaxy. This is an exciting time in the fields of astronomy and astrophysics. I look forward to hearing our witnesses’ perspectives on these issues.

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