

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



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**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Hearing on Space Threats: A Review of U.S. Government Efforts to Track and Mitigate Asteroids
and Meteors, Part I**

Chairman Smith: Good morning. Today's hearing is on a subject important to our nation and to our world. This is the first hearing of two on Space Threats to Earth, reviewing U.S. Government efforts to track incoming asteroids and meteors.

Although many may be only aware of this subject due to recent events, it is actually one as old as our planet. This is a copy of TIME Magazine from nearly 20 years ago (1994) where this topic was featured on the cover. Though the issue has been around for a number of years, there are many questions still to be asked and answered. The range of questions are broad and complex, from how to track an object millions of miles away to how to respond if an asteroid or meteor is headed toward Earth.

The two events of Friday, February 15 - the harmless flyby of asteroid 2012 DA14 and the not so harmless impact of a meteor in Russia - are a stark reminder of the need to invest in space science. The asteroid passed just 17,000 miles from Earth, a distance less than the Earth's circumference. Fifty years ago, we would have had no way of seeing the asteroid coming, and even so it was discovered by amateur astronomers. The U.S. has come a long way in its ability to track and characterize asteroids, meteors, comets and meteorites. But we still have a long way to go. NASA believes it has discovered 93 percent of the largest asteroids in near-Earth orbit, those one kilometer or larger.

But what about the other seven percent remaining, about 70, or even those smaller than one kilometer, estimated to be in the thousands? An asteroid as small as 100 meters could destroy an entire city upon a direct hit. Are we tracking those?

The meteor that struck Russia was estimated to be 17 meters, and wasn't tracked at all. The smaller they are, the harder they are to spot, and yet they can be life-threatening. The broad scope of our efforts include participation of governments, research institutions, industries and amateur astronomers in their backyard or on home computers.

Some space challenges require innovation, commitment and diligence. This is one of them. And this Committee will strive to continue to lead in this area. For all of the attention and publicity the two events of February 15 received, it was still too late for us to have acted to change the course of the incoming objects. We are in the same position today and for the foreseeable future unless we take actions now that improve our means of detection. Part of our discussion today is about how to achieve this in the current budget environment.

I do not believe that NASA is going to somehow defy budget gravity and get an increase when everyone else is getting cuts. But we need to find ways to prioritize NASA's projects and squeeze as much productivity as we can out of the funds we have.

Examining and exploring ways to protect the Earth from asteroids and meteors is a priority for the American people and should be a priority for NASA. We were fortunate that the events of last month were simply an interesting coincidence rather than a catastrophe.

However, we still need to make investments and improvements in our capability to anticipate what may occur decades from now, or tomorrow.

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