

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Astrobiology and the Search for Life Beyond Earth in the Next Decade.”
Full Committee Hearing

September 29, 2015

Good morning and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses. I look forward to your testimony.

Administrator Bolden stated, in the preface of NASA’s Strategic Plan, that when we explore the solar system and the universe, we gain knowledge about the dynamics of the Sun and the planetary system and whether we are alone.

With respect to the question of whether we are alone, the Search for Life Beyond Earth is a topic this Committee has devoted a lot of attention to over the past two years. I understand that the purpose of today’s hearing is to get another update on that topic. It is my hope that our witnesses will also take some time to discuss how their research activities can be used to help foster excitement in our young people and spur them to pursue careers in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

That’s important, because those young people are the future science and technological leaders and innovators who will be critical to our Nation’s growth and progress going forward. While it’s exciting to search for intelligent life elsewhere in the universe, I hope we don’t neglect nurturing the intelligent life we have right here in this country now.

As a final note, I want to recognize that this is a return visit by Dr. Lunine. One year ago, he and Governor Mitch Daniels testified before this Committee on their National Research Council panel’s report titled “*Pathways to Exploration: A Review of the Future of Human Exploration*” that was completed pursuant to the NASA Authorization Act of 2010.

I highly recommend that my newer colleagues on the Committee, and in the rest of the Congress as a whole for that matter, read this report as I found it to be objective in its endorsement of the goal of sending humans to Mars, and thoughtful in its recommendations for an exploration program to send humans to the surface of Mars—a central goal established by this Committee in the House-passed NASA Authorization Act of 2015.

With that, I again want to welcome our witnesses to today’s hearing, and I yield back.