COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

For Immediate Release
July 25, 2018

Media Contact: Heather Vaughan, Bridget Dunn
(202) 225-6371

Statement by Chairman Brian Babin (R-Texas)

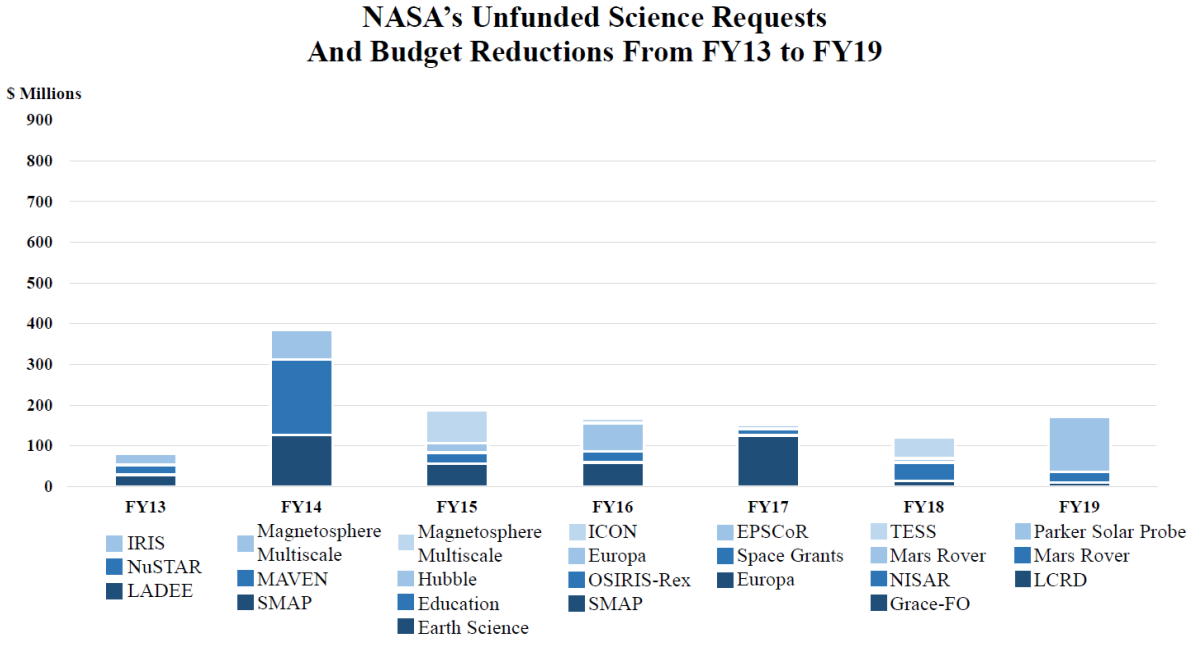
James Webb Space Telescope: Program Breach and its Implications

Chairman Babin: As the Chairman of the Space Subcommittee and proud representative of Johnson Space Center, I am a tireless advocate for NASA. I strongly believe in the mission of NASA and commend the tremendous dedication of the NASA and industry team.

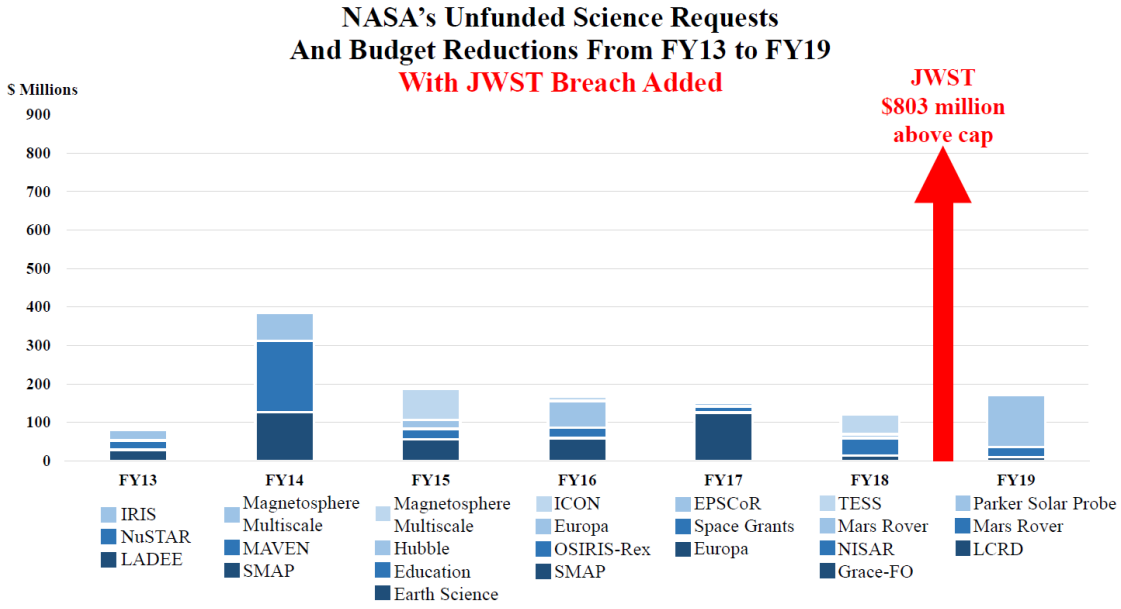
However, as members of this committee, we have a responsibility to every tax-payer to ensure that government agencies, including NASA, are being good stewards and effectively managing the resources with which they are entrusted.

Today's hearing will focus on the serious issues associated with the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) program breach and its implications, the Independent Review Board's (IRB) analysis and recommendations, and the coming debate over congressional reauthorization of the JWST.

Chairman Smith summarized the IRB's findings and recommendations, so I want to use this opportunity to discuss NASA's lost opportunities due to flagship program cost overruns. As the Space Subcommittee chairman, I focus on the NASA budget in its entirety and every project and program in agency's portfolio, particularly those where budget limitations force difficult decisions on reducing specific project budgets or whether we can fund them at all. Please give your attention to the chart on display.

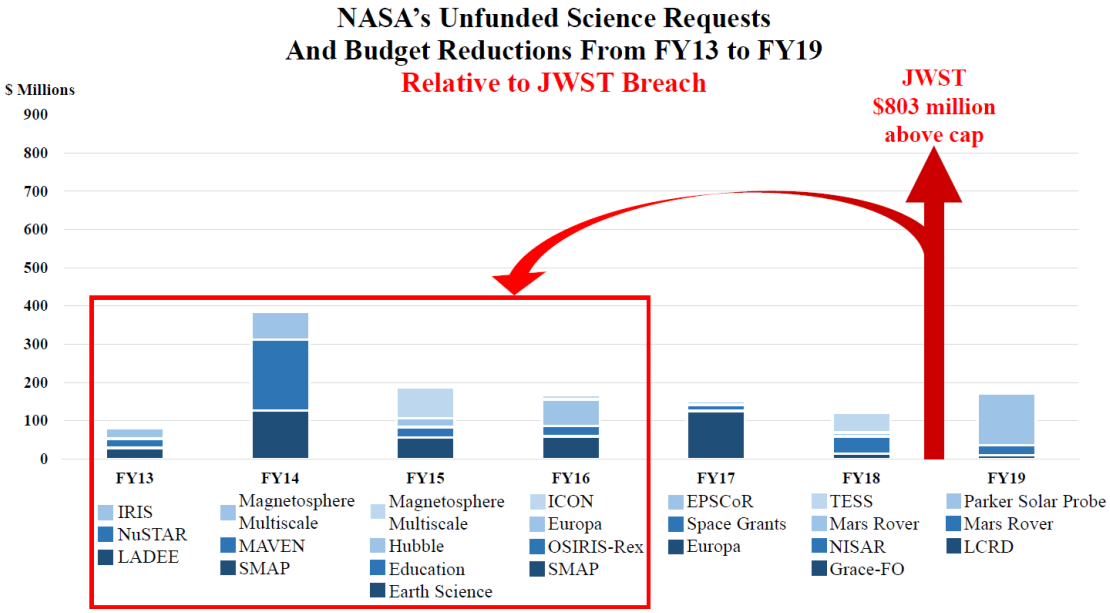


The committee surveyed NASA's science portfolio over the last few fiscal years to identify project budget reductions and unfunded requests due to limitations. Those projects are listed by fiscal year starting with FY13 and going through projections for FY19.



With FY18 coming to a close shortly and the IRB's announced JWST cap breach of $803 million in development costs, this chart reflects the reality of the breach going into FY19 budget planning.

In terms of lost opportunities and NASA's budgetary trade space, it is important to know the full impact the JWST breach caused for NASA and the American public as a whole.

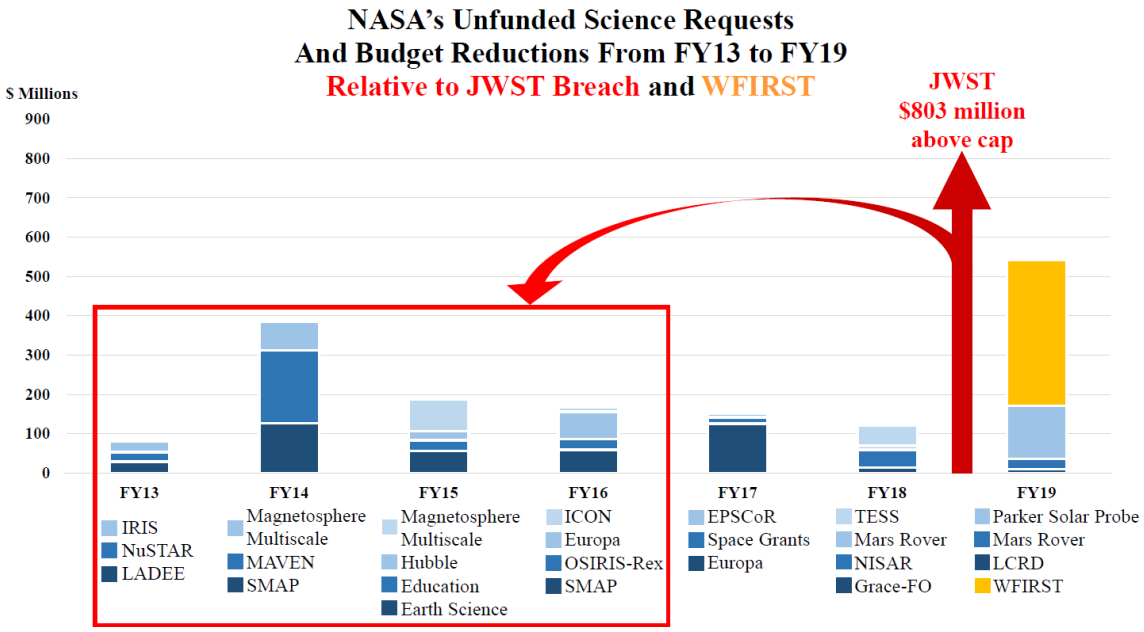


The $803 million needed to fund the JWST cost breach could fund nearly every one of NASA's science funding shortfalls from FY13 to FY16. These projects include Earth science and education projects greatly promoted by our Democratic colleagues on the committee.

Looking forward to FY19 and NASA's future flagship program plans, the cost issues with the Wide Field Infrared Survey Telescope (W-FIRST) will become a subject of debate alongside the JWST congressional reauthorization. The FY18 Omnibus required an updated life-cycle cost estimate for W-FIRST and NASA's report concludes the estimated cost range is $3.3 billion to $3.9 billion.

This life-cycle cost estimate exceeds the NASA-imposed cost cap of $3.2 billion included in the bipartisan NASA Authorization Act of 2018.

To give perspective to the funding dilemma presented by the JWST and W-FIRST cost issues, NASA's W-FIRST estimate includes a request for $371 million which is now reflected on this FY19 chart.



The bipartisan NASA Authorization Act of 2018 seeks to limit flagship program overlap to reduce the NASA's risk of becoming overwhelmed by W-FIRST development before JWST is operational in space. Thus, it is my hope the IRB report and our witness panel testimony will shed light on lessons learned with JWST, leading to a successful flight and operations in March 2021. We DO NOT want these mistakes repeated during the development of W-FIRST. Congress needs to understand the "unvarnished" status of these programs today, as well as the plan going forward. Decisions made now can have long lasting implications on future missions. We need to know that there is not a systematic or fundamental management problem with how NASA plans and executes these larger strategic missions.

I thank our witnesses here today, helping us to better understand where we are and how we plan to move forward, and look forward to your testimony.

###