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Statement by Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

James Webb Space Telescope: Program Breach and its Implications

Chairman Smith: Today, we will hear from Administrator Bridenstine on NASA's plans to ensure that the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is a success. We will also hear from Tom Young on the findings and recommendations of the JWST Independent Review Board (IRB).

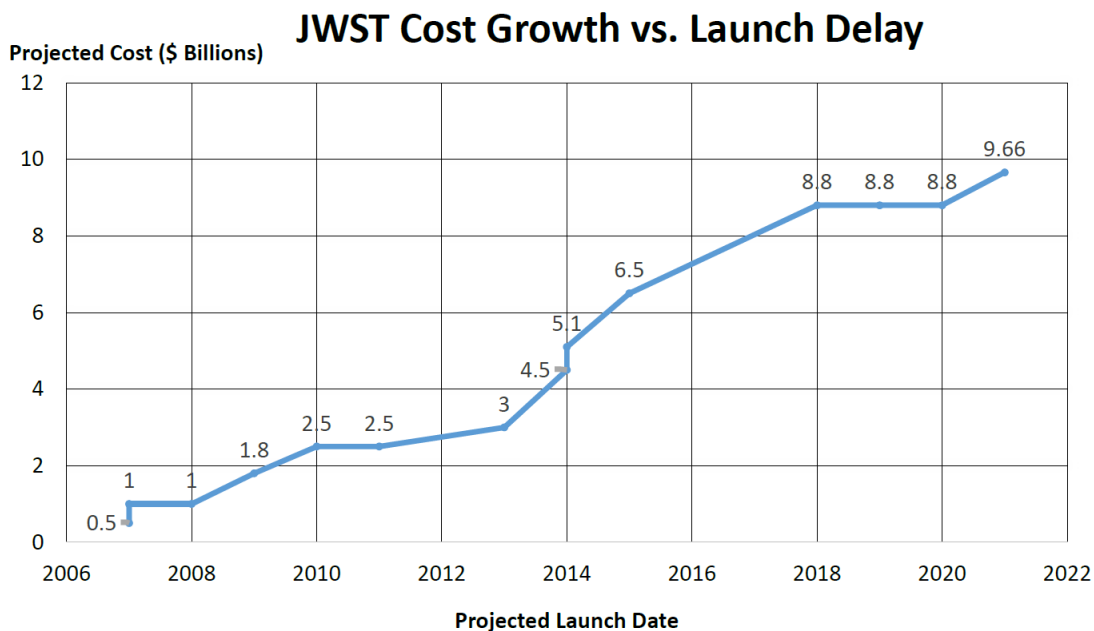
Tomorrow, at the second part of the hearing, Northrop Grumman's CEO, Mr. Wes Bush, will testify. We will learn more about why Northrop failed to deliver JWST on budget and on schedule and what can be done about it.

Welcome to Jim Bridenstine who is testifying for the first time since leaving the committee to become the NASA Administrator. He began his job with our high expectations, and he has already exceeded them. We can be confident that he is striving to tackle the program management issues NASA faces, specifically those associated with the James Webb Space Telescope.

Starting on March 26, 2018, NASA began notifying this committee about the JWST cost and schedule breaches.

Now that the IRB has completed its work, we should review the decades-long JWST cost overruns and schedule delays. Take a look at the chart on display.

[JWST cost and schedule delay chart]



This chart chronicles JWST's substantial cost growth and launch schedule delays starting with the 1996 initial projections in the lower-left corner all the way to the IRB's 2018 projection in the upper-right corner.

It is truly staggering to behold how this space telescope's cost and schedule projections went from costing the same as a Space Shuttle mission—around half a billion dollars with an original launch goal in 2007—to now becoming an expenditure exceeding \$9 billion with a new launch goal in March 2021. That is nineteen times the original cost and a delay of fourteen years. It's hard to get much worse than that.

The cost of delaying the launch again will add almost another billion dollars to the total program cost. The \$8 billion development cost cap set in 2012 will be exceeded by \$803 million. With other program costs added in, the IRB now estimates the total cost at \$9.6 billion.

The IRB also stated that technical complications and unclear reporting roles, responsibilities, and lines of communications greatly impacted the development schedule and its associated cost increases. Mr. Young will provide details during his testimony.

We will discuss options going forward, such as the contractor watch list designation contained in the bipartisan NASA Authorization Act of 2018.

I support the continuation of JWST to mission completion and appreciate Administrator Bridenstine's efforts to improve contractor performance.

Going forward, Congress needs to have the necessary confidence in NASA's contractors to put us on the right path at a reasonable cost. Anything short of that will undermine congressional confidence in contractors' ability to deliver on their promises.

Usually, when government contractors make mistakes, no one is held accountable. The mistakes "just happened" or "were unavoidable" or "won't happen again." But in every case, the American people pick up the bill. We often forget there is no such thing as federal dollars. It's the American taxpayers' hard-earned money.

If space exploration is going to continue to earn the public's support, then contractors will have to deliver on time and on budget. If they cannot, they should be penalized.

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