

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



**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)**

Hearing on Exploring Our Solar System: The ASTEROIDS Act as a Key Step

**Chairman Smith:** Thank you, Chairman Palazzo, for holding this hearing. Planetary science teaches us about how our Solar System works and provides clues about how it was formed.

Planetary missions search for scientific evidence that microbial life could potentially exist on planets within our solar system. They also map the locations of minerals and potential water sources on asteroids, comets, moons, and planets that could be extracted for use here on Earth.

One such mission called New Horizons is a robotic mission scheduled to reach Pluto next year. It will provide the first close-up images and measurements ever made of the dwarf planet. A mission to Europa could search for microbial life in the salty waters that lie underneath that moon's icy crust.

The President's budget requests have made it clear that this Administration does not consider planetary science a priority. Over the past two years, the Obama Administration has significantly cut funding for NASA's Planetary Science Division.

In June, the House passed the bipartisan NASA Authorization Act of 2014 by a vote of 401 to 2. In May, the House passed the Commerce-Justice-Science appropriations bill (H.R. 4660) by a bipartisan vote of 321 to 87. The bill provides \$170 million more to the Planetary Science Division than the President's budget request for FY15. The Senate Committee on Appropriations also approved a bill that would provide \$23 million above the President's request.

Congress has made it clear, on a bipartisan and bicameral basis, that we value the planetary science community and the important work they do.

Planetary science missions help lay the ground work for manned missions. If the Administration does not support planetary science, how can they claim to have serious interest in human space exploration? I hope that the Administration is paying attention to today's discussion.

Planetary research also has significant commercial interest. We now know that asteroids contain water and rare minerals that are in short supply on Earth. Several U.S. companies hope to someday develop business models that leverage the findings of planetary science to identify and extract these resources.

The legal framework to establish property rights to these resources has yet to be established. H.R. 5063, the "American Space Technology for Exploring Resource Opportunities in Deep Space Act" (ASTEROIDS Act), introduced by Representatives Bill Posey of Florida and Derek Kilmer of Washington is the first bill to address important issues about the relatively new commercial intent to obtain resources from space.

It discusses property rights for companies that find rare minerals and other materials in asteroids. It also directs the President to minimize barriers to growth of the industry.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished panel of witnesses today about their perspectives on the ASTEROIDS Act and the groundbreaking work that's being conducted in planetary science.  
Thank you.

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