



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

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Statement by Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

America's Human Presence in Low-Earth Orbit

Chairman Smith: Our nation faces important questions about future space exploration. Will the International Space Station (ISS) stop receiving federal support in 2025? If so, under what conditions? What is the future of America's human presence in low-Earth orbit? Beyond that, what is the future of human presence on the Moon and Mars?

The ISS has been authorized and funded to operate until 2024. Decisions about the long-term future of the ISS impact the future of America's human space exploration program.

Unless NASA's budget is significantly increased, there are not enough funds both to maintain direct federal support for the ISS and return American astronauts to the surface of the moon in the 2020s. And without a sharp increase in funding for NASA, we cannot ensure American leadership in human deep space exploration in the next decade and beyond.

NASA announced an ISS transition plan at the end of March. According to the proposal, the United States should not continue direct federal support for ISS operation beyond 2024. The private sector—commercial space—may well pick up where NASA leaves off.

In addition to the transition of the ISS, a related but important question is the future of America's human presence in low-Earth orbit. After 2025, should Americans maintain *some* human presence in low-Earth orbit, even on a limited basis? But, having an "American human presence in low-Earth orbit" does not *necessarily* mean continuing to operate the ISS. Discussing continued human presence and continued operation of the ISS are related, but distinct subjects.

Existing law can help guide this discussion. The 2017 NASA Transition Authorization Act reaffirms the principle of "continuity of purpose." It also establishes that extending human presence throughout the solar system is a long-term goal for NASA. It directs NASA to follow a "stepping stone" approach to exploration.

This involves expanding human presence from low-Earth orbit to the moon, from the moon to Mars, and then from Mars to other bodies throughout the solar system. The 2018 NASA Authorization Act was approved by the Science Committee on a bipartisan vote and the act supports the administration's transition plan in FY 2019.

It is my hope that this hearing will help us evaluate the transition of the ISS and continued American presence in low-Earth orbit.

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