



COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Full Committee Hearing – “A Review of the President’s Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Proposal for NASA”

June 23, 2021

Before I start, I would like to thank Chairwoman Johnson for holding this hybrid hearing and enabling Members, staff, and Administrator Nelson to participate in person safely. After a year and a half of virtual hearings, I think I speak for the entire Republican conference when I say that it is good to be back doing the people’s business in person - so thank you.

Today’s hearing is important and timely. For several years NASA has conducted review after review of its Human Spaceflight Program. Although the overall goal to return U.S. astronauts to the Moon remains consistent, NASA has changed its plans on how to accomplish that goal several times after numerous reviews.

As numerous independent advisory groups like the National Academies of Sciences and the Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel have highlighted, program stability is critical to ensuring overall mission success. As Administrator Nelson knows, Congress has provided this consistency for nearly 20 years following the *Columbia* accident investigation, the cancellation of the Shuttle, and the development of deep space capabilities. Despite the ebbs and flows of each new Administration’s priorities, Congress has maintained a steady course for our Nation’s space program.

That’s why I was pleased to see that the Biden Administration is continuing the Artemis program. Keeping our sights on returning to the Moon in a manner that enables exploration of Mars and beyond is paramount at this critical juncture. The Orion spacecraft was delivered to the Kennedy Space Center (KSC) last year, and the Space Launch System (SLS) also was recently delivered to KSC after a successful “Green Run.” It’s exciting to see the SLS being stacked with boosters in the Vehicle Assembly Building as we speak. NASA’s exploration ground systems are working diligently to receive, process, and launch these critical national systems.

But more work remains. NASA’s Human Landing System procurement is stalled by GAO protests. Everyone wants to get started on this critical piece of hardware, but we

must first let the process play out and adjust course based on the GAO's ruling and available funding. I look forward to working with our colleagues in the Senate, on the Appropriations Committees, and in the Administration to chart a path forward that enables the success our space program.

The largest unknown looming on the horizon is the budget. Finding an extra \$10 billion for the Human Landing System is no easy task. While the Senate recently authorized an additional \$10 billion and required NASA to select an additional contractor, if NASA doesn't get additional appropriated funding, this could become an unfunded mandate that could end up with NASA having to cut billions of dollars from other programs. I am sure no one wants to see this happen. That's why it's important for NASA to propose realistic plans, budgets, and schedules and not rely on "Hail Mary Passes" to save the day.

Other nations, like China, are making slow and steady progress and are following disciplined plans. We must maintain steady support for our national space programs so that new frontiers in space are explored by free nations, not oppressive regimes.