



Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

Full Committee Hearing
*An Overview of the Fiscal Year 2024 Proposed Budget Request for the National
Aeronautics and Space Administration*

April 27, 2023

Good afternoon. I want to welcome everyone to today's hearing to review the Administration's proposed budget request for NASA for fiscal year 2024. And I'd like to thank you for joining us here today, Administrator Nelson.

The Administration requested \$27.2 billion for NASA, which would be an increase of \$1.8 billion dollars over current funding levels, or about a 7% increase.

The submission of the Administration's budget request kicks off the annual appropriations process.

As authorizers, we play an important role in this process by establishing priorities and policy direction for NASA.

In our oversight capacity, we ensure the agency is operating consistently with Congressional intent. This oversight helps ensure our colleagues at the Appropriations Committee can feel justified in spending our limited dollars on these efforts.

That is why one of my top priorities this Congress is the passage of a comprehensive NASA authorization bill. It has been more than six years since a comprehensive authorization bill was signed into law and that is far too long for an agency of NASA's importance.

Today's hearing will inform our deliberations as we draft this bill.

It's also a chance to reflect on NASA's many recent accomplishments and consider what we can learn from these successes.

I know I speak for everyone in this room when I say how proud I was to see the successful launch of Artemis 1 last November. Returning humans to the Moon is one of our highest priorities, and this was an incredible first step towards that goal.

I also continue to be amazed by the stunning images and groundbreaking science produced by the James Webb Space Telescope. We're seeing farther back in history than ever before, and I'm excited to see what we'll learn next.

I'm invested in the success of these missions, and of NASA's other work. And I'm mindful that future achievements require hard work for both NASA and this Committee.

Importantly, Congress and NASA must work together to ensure Artemis remains on track to return humans to the Lunar surface. That's why I'm interested in understanding why the budget request would delay Artemis 4 from 2027 to 2028.

We must also be certain that missions in NASA's science portfolio remain on time and within budget.

As impressive as the images and science produced by the James Webb Space Telescope might be, we cannot forget that it was billions of dollars over budget and years behind schedule.

Because of those massive cost and time overruns, the telescope came at the expense of many other worthy science missions.

And yet here we are again, seeing how cost estimates ballooning for a single mission--the Mars Sample Return--can negatively impact other missions.

Because of these overflowing costs, NASA has been forced to make difficult choices in its science portfolio. It postponed a selected mission to Venus, indefinitely paused a flagship heliophysics mission, and delayed launch of an important asteroid detection spacecraft. If this trend continues, then NASA may have to make difficult decisions to postpone or cancel future missions. This is unacceptable and we must do better.

So I look forward to hearing how NASA intends to ensure that current science missions remain on schedule and within budget.

And there are many other areas where we need to review the agency's activities. From NASA's work on aeronautics, to its development of new technologies to allow us to explore farther in the solar system, to transitioning to new orbital platforms in low Earth orbit, there is no shortage of work for the Committee in the coming months.

I will remind my colleagues that we are not the only country interested in returning to the Moon and traveling beyond. China has made no secret of its ambition to also have a sustained human presence on the Moon. I want to be clear that I will do everything within my power to ensure that the next astronauts on the Moon are Americans.

I want to welcome Administrator Nelson back to this hearing room, where he spent many years as a member of this Committee. I look forward to his testimony and a productive discussion about NASA's plans for the future.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for her opening statement.