OPENING STATEMENT

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Subcommittee on Space
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Space Subcommittee Hearing
"Exploring Our Solar System: The ASTEROIDS Act as a Key Step"
September 10, 2014

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing on planetary science, and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses.

The accomplishments in planetary science research and robotic exploration of the solar system are indicative of the exemplary work being done by NASA and its industry contractors, academia, and the non-governmental entities that comprise the planetary science community. The discoveries and advancements being enabled by NASA's planetary science program are thrilling.

Just weeks from now, NASA's MAVEN spacecraft will enter into Mars orbit for its study of the Mars atmosphere. And in October, just over a month from now, it will be "all hands on deck" for our Mars orbiters and rovers when NASA will have an unprecedented opportunity to use these assets to observe C/2013 A1--otherwise known as Comet Siding Spring—as it passes near Mars and bathes the planet in dust from its coma and tail. It is fortuitous that MAVEN, which will be a key observer of this event, will have arrived just weeks before Siding Spring's encounter with Mars. Finally, later this fall, the European-U.S. Rosetta comet mission will make the first attempt at a controlled landing of a robotic lander on a comet.

What this means to me is that we are getting real value from our investments in planetary science. Because a strong planetary science program is important not only to advancing our scientific understanding of the solar system, but also to detecting potentially hazardous near-Earth objects, providing scientific insights relevant to the long-term goal of sending humans to Mars, and to the training of our future scientists and engineers.

And I can't underscore enough the importance of NASA's programs, including planetary science, to inspiring the next generation. NASA's science missions provide concrete connections between learning science, technology, engineering, and math in the classroom and exciting projects in space, perhaps even ones that students dream to be a part of one day.

Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the many developments taking place in planetary science. I also look forward to working with you on ensuring that Congress provides the resources NASA needs for all of its mission areas, including planetary science, to enable a robust and innovative 21st century U.S. space program going forward.

And while my understanding is that the purpose of this hearing is to examine planetary science, I also note that the Majority has asked for discussion on H.R. 5063, the ASTEROIDS Act. The issues raised by the Act on resource utilization and property rights are important and interesting areas that I hope the Subcommittee will continue to explore more substantively in the next Congress.

Before I close, I want to remember a key figure in NASA and planetary sciences, Dr. Noel Hinners, who passed away last Friday. Dr. Hinners was a chief scientist of NASA, director of the Goddard Space Flight Center, director of the Smithonsian's National Air and Space Museum, and vice president of flight systems at Lockheed Martin where he was responsible for Lockheed's work on NASA planetary science missions.

NASA's planetary science program wouldn't be what it is today without the contributions of leaders such as Dr. Hinners, and our thoughts are with his family during this difficult time.

Thank you, and I yield back.