

OPENING STATEMENT
Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
Subcommittee on Space
“NASA’S Next Four Large Telescopes”
December 6, 2017

Good afternoon, and welcome to our witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on NASA’s Next Four Large Telescopes. Today we will receive an update on three telescopes that are likely to revolutionize our understanding of the cosmos. Two of those telescopes, JWST and WFIRST, were the top recommendations of the National Academies’ widely respected and highly influential decadal survey process, which was pioneered by the astronomy and astrophysics community in 1964. Each of these independent decadal surveys has involved hundreds of scientists and resulted in an independent, peer-reviewed set of recommended science goals and missions to guide NASA’s astrophysics program for the next decade.

Importantly, the decadal survey has also consistently recommended that federal investments be made in a way that ensures a balance is maintained between support for large, medium, and small missions and the research that turns data from those missions into new knowledge. While the decadal survey process is not perfect, it is this independent, consensus-based process that has been critical to ensuring that Congress supports the priorities established by the astronomy community rather than missions favored by some parties. That is why Congress, in successive NASA Authorization Acts, has consistently directed that NASA’s science programs be based on decadal survey priorities. Most recently, the 2017 NASA Authorization Act directs NASA to “set science priorities by following the guidance provided by the scientific community through the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine’s decadal surveys.”

The recommendations of the 2010 astronomy and astrophysics decadal are particularly important as NASA works to determine the appropriate scope of the WFIRST mission. I commend NASA for taking the time to undertake an independent review to assess the alignment of this mission to the decadal survey’s guidance and to the goal of ensuring the overall balance of the astronomy program. In addition, I look forward to hearing about the progress NASA is making on its next space telescopes. I am glad to see that NASA is preparing for the upcoming astronomy and astrophysics decadal survey by conducting four large mission concept studies for the decadal committee to consider during its deliberations.

I note that we only have representation from one of the four candidate mission concepts here today. I look forward to hearing about the other three mission concepts, today or in the near future, as well because I am sure they are equally fascinating. Of course, it is ultimately the role of the National Academies, and not Congress, to deliberate the science promise of each of these mission concepts.

I look forward to our witness’ testimony. Thank you, and I yield back.