



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS Frank Lucas, Ranking Member

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Brian Babin

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing

Developing Core Capabilities for Deep Space Exploration: An Update on NASA's SLS, Orion, and Exploration Ground Systems

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NASA's long-term goal, as laid out consistently in the 2005, 2008, 2010, and 2017 NASA Authorization Acts, is to explore the Moon, Mars, and beyond in stepping stone approach based on available funding.

Numerous reports over the last 50 years have all determined that we need at least a 40-60 ton launch vehicle, and ideally a 130 ton launch vehicle, to conduct any meaningful exploration of deep space. We also need a crew capsule that can operate for extended periods in deep space with sufficient environmental controls and life support systems and in-space propulsion capability, and the ability to withstand reentry from the Moon and Mars. The Space Launch System (SLS), Orion Crew Vehicle, and Exploration Ground Systems are the only systems designed to operate beyond low Earth orbit. They are the tip of the spear of our nation's deep space exploration efforts.

SLS and Orion will enable U.S. astronauts to return to the Moon for the first time since Gene Cernan left his daughter's name in the lunar regolith in 1972. As Vice President Pence said in the inaugural meeting of the reestablished National Space Council, "We will return American astronauts to the Moon, not only to leave behind footprints and flags, but to build the foundation we need to send Americans to Mars and beyond.

I wholeheartedly support the Administration's call to return to the Moon and renewed sense of urgency. This Committee has received testimony time and again that the Moon is the appropriate next destination for our space program. Returning to the Moon does not have to mean delaying a mission to Mars. On the contrary, it is a logical step that enables exploration of the red planet and beyond.

While I am excited by the promise of how strategic assets like SLS and Orion will enable America's to return to the Moon, this Committee has a responsibility to conduct oversight to ensure these programs are successful. All three exploration system elements - SLS, Orion, and Ground Systems — have experienced many delays and overruns over the years. Some

of the setbacks were caused by Administrations that tried to stifle program budgets and even cancel the programs.

Some of the issues were caused by unforeseen events like tornadoes and hurricanes. But many of the issues recently were caused by poor execution. As the GAO's testimony reports, "...management and oversight problems are the real drivers behind program cost and schedule growth." Congress needs to understand where the program is today. What cost, schedule, and performance deliverables can the agency commit to? What is the plan going forward? How will NASA manage future issues to ensure long-term program sustainability?

As I said at the last hearing on these programs, we aren't out of the woods yet, but we can see the edge of the forest. Significant progress has been made, but not as much as we had hoped. We must have a sense of urgency.

In order to meet our nation's space exploration goals, it will take focus, discipline, and continuity of effort going forward. The Administration and Congress must not only provide leadership and direction, but we also must appropriately fund and oversee the program. NASA must develop future exploration architectures that use the capabilities of SLS and Orion to their full potential rather than setting them up for failure.

Similarly, NASA and the contractors must execute. Failure to do so could have dire consequences for the program, and there will be no one else to blame. The Administration has demonstrated its renewed support. Congress consistently funds the program at healthy levels. It is time for NASA and the contractors to deliver.

I am thankful that our witnesses are here today to help us better understand where we are at with the program, and how we plan to move forward. I look forward to your testimony.

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