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

Opening Statement of Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Ranking Member Brian Babin

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing

Keeping Our Sights on Mars Part 2: Structuring a Moon-Mars Program for Success

November 13, 2019

This summer we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing. Rather than resting on our laurels, the Trump Administration challenged NASA to return to the Moon on its way to Mars. This is an audacious goal.

For over 15 years, multiple Congresses, controlled by both Republicans and Democrats, have passed Authorization Acts that directed NASA to do the exact same thing. All of these Acts directed NASA to explore the Moon, Mars, and beyond using a "stepping stone" approach. The laws directed NASA to efficiently develop technologies and architectures that enable further exploration and prevent "dead-end" technologies and missions. The laws direct NASA to leverage the expertise at NASA centers and the work done on the Space Launch System (SLS) and Orion Crew vehicle that employ technologies derived from taxpayer investments in the Space Shuttle Program. Finally, Congress consistently directed NASA to explore deep space on a timetable determined by the availability of funding.

The National Space Council, led by Vice President Pence, has adopted those principles for the Trump Administration. Space Policy Directive 1 (SPD-1) directs NASA to, "[l]ead an innovative and sustainable program of exploration…" SPD-1 also directed NASA to "lead the return of humans to the Moon for long-term exploration and utilization, followed by human missions to Mars and other destinations."

The Administration should be commended for subsequently challenging NASA to achieve this goal by 2024. For several years, NASA has lacked a sense of urgency. Without a worthwhile near-term goal, our Nation's space enterprise lacked consistency and focus. This allowed the previous Administration to slash early-stage funding for SLS and Orion, propose cuts year-over-year, stretch out development schedules, scale-back capabilities, impose unique accounting rules like "termination liability," and hold up the purchase of long-lead items during continuing resolutions.

We now have bold leadership that is empowering NASA to lean forward. NASA recently issued a Broad Agency Announcement (BAA) soliciting proposals for a Human Landing System within 30 days. NASA directed contractors to only propose landers that can launch on commercial launch vehicles. This is despite the fact that every space exploration study conducted over the last 40 years indicated that the most optimal architectures for exploring the Moon and Mars require a heavy-lift launch vehicle similar to SLS. This strategy also fails to leverage the investments the taxpayer made over the last decade.

While I share the frustration in delays to the SLS program, switching horses midstream is not a wise move at the point. The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel and the National Academies have all reported that one of the largest risks to the success of our human exploration program is a lack of consistency. Its also fair to note that other human exploration developments, like Commercial Crew, are also behind schedule.

At our last Space Subcommittee hearing, NASA said that maintaining the 2024 date for a Lunar landing is unlikely if they do not receive the additional funding they requested in their budget amendment. If a recent House Appropriations Committee hearing is any indication, the likelihood of receiving additional funding this year is decreasing. If this forces NASA to reassess its schedule for returning to the Moon, it would provide an opportunity to ensure that they are developing the ideal architecture that maximizes mission success and minimizes risk. This could be done by developing landers that leverage the investments already made by the taxpayer in national capabilities like SLS and Orion and relying on the private sector to contribute augmenting cargo capabilities and delivering precursor science payloads to the Lunar surface. By this time, NASA may have concrete funding details and a more refined acquisition strategy.

I look forward to working with the Administration and my colleagues here in Congress to make Artemis a success. I'd like to thank our two distinguished witnesses for their service, and look forward to their testimony. I yield back the balance of my time.

###