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

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Frank Lucas

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing

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

November 13, 2019

Tomorrow marks the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 12 launch. On November 14, 1969, Pete Conrad, Alan Bean, and Richard Gordon set off on humanity's second mission to the lunar surface. Despite harrowing winds and lightning strikes that overloaded the spacecraft's fuel cells during the launch, the mission's success proved America's resolve to explore space. It demonstrated that Apollo 11 wasn't a fluke or a one-time achievement, but rather the dawn of a new era for mankind.

The missions after Apollo 11 may not have been as celebrated, but they solidified America's leadership in space and were just as valuable to our studies of the Moon. But what if we did not return to the Moon after Apollo 11? Thankfully we did, and we followed that up with a string of successive missions culminating with Apollo 17. Unfortunately, we haven't been back to the Moon since Gene Cernan left his daughter's initials in the lunar dust in 1972 on Apollo 17. That's 47 years - nearly half a century.

I can't help but draw comparisons to the current state of human space exploration. Rather than cancelling a return to the Moon by saying, "we've been there before," the Trump Administration set a bold course to return to the Moon and assure American leadership in space. Just as Apollo 12 affirmed America's resolve last century, the Administration's plans to return to the Moon will demonstrate our resolve and leadership in this century.

This is because we have the potential to learn much more now than we did a half century ago. Just last week, NASA scientists opened an untouched sample of lunar rocks collected during Apollo 17. We kept those samples preserved for nearly 50 years because we knew our technology would advance rapidly in the years following Apollo 17 and we could learn more from analyzing them now, in pristine condition, than we could at the time.

Similarly, returning to the Moon now will help us develop the technology necessary to land humans on Mars. It will allow our astronauts to learn how to operate in deep space and on a surface of another world only days away – rather than months or years away.

The Artemis program has already energized the NASA workforce, motivated contractors, and inspired scientists and students. Artemis will require marshaling our nation's best and brightest as well as significant contributions from our international partners and the private sector. This is a worthwhile task because great nations do great things.

As we set forth on our return to the Moon, we should always be mindful of the lessons we learned from Apollo and the decades that followed. Progressing incrementally on successive achievements, limiting the number of mission elements to decrease risk, and maintaining consistency of purpose are lessons that are just as relevant today as they were 50 years ago. Luckily, we have two great witnesses who I am sure can add to that list for us.

One of those witnesses, Lieutenant General Thomas Stafford (Ret.), grew up in Weatherford, OK, which I proudly represent. After attending from the Naval Academy and serving as an Air Force test pilot, he was selected for Astronaut Group 2 in 1962. He went on to fly aboard Gemini 6A, Gemini 9, Apollo 10, and the Apollo-Soyuz Test Project. He served as Director of the Astronaut Office, commanded the Air Force Flight Test Center at Edwards Air Force Base, and was the Deputy Chief of Staff, Research Development and Acquisition at the Pentagon.

Since retirement, he served as the Chairman of the International Space Station Advisory Committee and chaired the Synthesis Group that produced the report titled "America at the Threshold" on the Space Exploration Initiative.

His awards are too numerous to mention, but probably his finest accomplishment is being born in western Oklahoma, where his namesake, the Stafford Air and Space Museum resides. I am proud to call him a constituent, a friend, and a confidant.

Thank you for holding this hearing, Madam Chairwoman. I yield back the balance of my time.

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