



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

## **Opening Statement of Ranking Member Brian Babin**

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing – Enabling Mission Success from the Ground Up: Addressing NASA’s Urgent Infrastructure Needs

*July 29, 2021*

---

The purpose of today’s hearing is to address NASA’s complex infrastructure issues. NASA is one of the largest property holders in the federal government. They manage nine field centers and six other facilities in 14 different states. This includes \$40 billion in assets with an inventory of more than 5,000 buildings and structures. As our NASA witness will testify, many of NASA’s buildings and labs are relics of the Apollo, Gemini, and Mercury era, and some even predate NASA to the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics era. Indeed, 83 percent of NASA’s facilities are beyond their design life. It costs up to three times more to repair or replace equipment after it has failed rather than if the maintenance had occurred as scheduled. In 2013, the last time this Committee examined NASA’s infrastructure, the deferred maintenance backlog was estimated to cost \$2.1 billion. It is now \$2.66 billion.

I proudly represent the Johnson Space Center – home to NASA’s historic Mission Control Center, and many other unique national capabilities like the Sonny Carter Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory that trains astronauts for spacewalks; the Experimental Impact Laboratory that studies the effects of high-velocity impacts into geologic materials; Ellington Field that houses many of NASA’s critical aircraft; the Astromaterials Acquisition and Curation Office that studies materials returned from space; and the White Sands Test Facility that tests materials and propulsion systems. Because I represent one of the largest NASA centers, I am certainly aware of the challenges NASA faces when it comes to infrastructure. There is no greater advocate for NASA facilities, which are critical national assets.

Unfortunately, long-term infrastructure and maintenance investments take a backseat to near-term program and mission requirements. But failure to adequately maintain and manage infrastructure could actually compromise NASA’s ability to carry out its vast array of missions. That’s why the NASA Office of the Inspector General highlighted infrastructure in its 2020 report on top management and performance challenges.

Rather than being an afterthought, NASA must proactively assess and manage its infrastructure and budgets to reflect its missions and responsibilities. To its credit, NASA has attempted to do this through various initiatives over the years. NASA developed an Agency Facilities Strategy, an Agency Master Plan, Center Master Plans, elevated mission support to the directorate level, developed a Mission Dependency Index and a Facilities Condition Index, conducted a Technical Capabilities Assessment as well as a Business Services Assessment, and is moving towards a new NASA Operating Model and Mission Support Architecture Program. That's a lot of management jargon, but hopefully it will lead to efficient decision-making and resource allocation.

Put simply, NASA should do what every family in this country does – manage its budget. When a family considers new spending, they factor in the rent, mortgage, and upkeep. NASA's FY22 budget request calls for an overall increase of 6.3 percent. NASA's FY22 budget request for Safety, Security, and Mission Services, which funds Center maintenance and operations, is roughly \$3 billion, a 3.8 percent increase over FY21 enacted levels. The FY22 request for Construction, Environmental Compliance, and Remediation is actually a 9 percent reduction. If NASA's facilities and infrastructure are in need, it should be appropriately prioritized in the agency's budget request.

Administrator Nelson indicated earlier this year that NASA has a list of infrastructure requirements totaling over \$5 billion, but the Administration has not formally requested additional funding to my knowledge. That means additional infrastructure funding hasn't been cleared by the Office of Management and Budget, nor has it been considered in the larger context of the federal budget, including offsets, deficits, or additional revenue requirements. I think we can all agree that NASA's infrastructure is critical to its overall mission success, but it needs to be incorporated and prioritized in the formal budget process, not as an off-budget wish-list. Creating a budget is what every family in this country does. I am confident NASA, the Administration, and Congress can do the same.