



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 3: A Status Update and Review of NASA's Artemis Initiative

March 1, 2022

Thank you, Chairwoman Johnson, for holding today's hearing on the Artemis program and our efforts to send Americans back to the Moon and then on to Mars.

This mission is the most complex and most important that NASA has undertaken to date. It is far more ambitious than our landings more than 50 years ago in the 1960s and 1970s because this time, we're going back to stay.

Still, we can take lessons from that pioneering generation of space explorers. Just 66 years after the Wright brothers first flew an airplane, NASA landed humans on the Moon.

But in the 50 years since we last walked the Moon, we've not returned, nor have we advanced farther in our solar system. How did NASA go from its founding in 1958 to a Moon landing in 1969? The same way we accomplish any big mission – we made it a priority. We had strong leadership, a clear vision, precise timelines, steady funding, and an incredibly talented workforce.

We still have the most talented workforce in the world, but I'm concerned that we're missing the rest of those variables. We are one year in to the 117th Congress and this is our first hearing on the Artemis program. We have not achieved much on space policy in general this Congress, unfortunately. All we have to show for our work is an Enhanced Use Leasing bill that was hijacked for a dead-end federal election bill. We're back to square one on that, and will have to start over.

As the Congressional committee with jurisdiction over NASA, it's our responsibility to maintain a strong space program. And specifically, we must ensure a successful Artemis program. We have to provide close oversight, clear guidance, and work with our appropriators to allocate consistent funding.

I stand ready to do so. I'd like to get to work on a NASA reauthorization bill as soon as possible. It pains me to say that our counterparts on the Senate side have made progress and passed legislation on this while we have stalled.

But Congress can only do so much. NASA needs to provide us with an updated plan, precise timeline and a realistic budget. Simply put: Tell us how long it will take, how we will do it, and how much it costs.

The Artemis program must be NASA's highest priority and I expect the Administration's actions to start reflecting this. I understand that it takes a minute for any incoming Administration to appoint new leadership and for them to get up to speed. But we're a year in now and we don't even have a target date for when we can anticipate a Moon landing.

A recent Inspector General report made it clear that NASA will not meet its goal of landing humans on the Moon by 2024. It also recommended that NASA create an Integrated Master Schedule to identify and sequence all the Artemis program activities. Operating with a clear and comprehensive timetable will improve efficiency and ensure we're holding to realistic but prompt deadlines.

What's more, this Administration has not given us realistic budget estimates for Artemis. I'm tired of the narrative that Congress isn't giving NASA the money it needs. NASA needs to give us robust and accurate budget requests so that Congress can authorize and fund appropriately.

That same Inspector General report stated flat out that "NASA does not have a credible estimate that consolidates all Artemis costs across mission directorates."

We won't get to the Moon and Mars with imprecise budgets and vague deadlines. And underestimating the costs of large missions like this doesn't serve anyone. I'd like to see this Administration put forth an accurate budget request this year so we can take that into account when making funding decisions.

One way to address these ongoing cost and scheduling concerns is to designate a single Program Manager for Artemis to integrate and coordinate the many complex elements at play. So those are the issues we must address today – cost, budget, and leadership. It is my hope that this hearing helps provide some answers to these outstanding questions.

The good news is that I believe we all share the same goal. We all want to return Americans to the Moon as soon as safely possible. And we all want to take the next great leap in space exploration and send humans to another planet. That's why I'm hopeful that we can improve how Artemis is run.

I believe space exploration has value in and of itself. It's human instinct to seek knowledge and pursue new frontiers. And I also believe there are economic, technological, and national security benefits to America's space program.

We have long benefited from being the leader in space, but China is making aggressive moves to expand their presence, and Vladimir Putin is acting increasingly erratic and irresponsible.

As the frontrunner in space exploration, the U.S. established early precedents of transparency, open science, and peaceful collaboration. I can assure you that the space program run by the People's Liberation Army does not share those goals.

Through the Artemis Accords, the United States has pledged to work with our allies to support peaceful and cooperative exploration and research. We have made a commitment to international collaboration that benefits all of humankind. These are the values that must guide our activity in space.

I am incredibly excited to see Artemis take off – literally and figuratively. And I'm honored to serve on the Committee with oversight of this historic effort. To our witnesses – thank you for being here today and sharing your expertise. I look forward to hearing more about how we can continue to strengthen and improve our efforts to return to the Moon and explore Mars.