COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE SPACE & TECHNOLOGY
REPUBLICANS

# Opening Statement of Ranking Member Brian Babin

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing – Unfolding the Universe: Initial Science Results from the James Webb Space Telescope

*November 16, 2022*

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Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to welcome to our witnesses for appearing before us today

The James Webb Space Telescope - also known as JWST - finally launched last Christmas morning with great fanfare. The flagship mission is the culmination of over two decades of hard work and $10 billion in taxpayer investment. The successful development, launch, and deployment of JWST is a testament to the engineers, scientists, technicians that were so committed to the project. NASA and its contractors once again demonstrated that the impossible is within reach.

JWST also shows that the U.S. is still capable of building and operating large-scale highly technical systems. This fact can't be overstated. While it is great to take a victory lap with the successful check-out of JWST's systems, we must also be vigilant in maintaining this capability in the future. We can't take for granted that we will be able to build cutting-edge systems in the future just because we were able to do so in the past. It will require ongoing Congressional support and oversight to maintain key capabilities to build these world-class systems. This is imperative not only for our scientific leadership, but also our national and economic security, as the dual-use nature of space impacts our citizens' lives every day.

Just as with the Hubble Space Telescope and NASA's other "great observatories", we expect great things. JWST was touted as potentially rewriting textbooks. As breath-taking images and results have come in from JWST over the last four months, we are finally starting to see the fruits of our labor. Today's hearing is an opportunity to review these findings and think about the future.

With the spacecraft operating and providing data, what are the lessons learned from JWST that can be applied to future missions like the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope or future follow-on observatories? How can Congress help ensure that those lessons learned are implemented and followed through on? Because the last thing we want to do is make the same mistakes twice. Cost overruns and schedule delays have

real-world impacts. They delay the start of other new, exciting, missions, and sometimes prevent them from even starting.

The recent example of the Psyche mission comes to mind. Developed under the cost-capped Discovery program in NASA's Planetary Science division, Psyche missed its planned launch date earlier this year and will not launch before next October. This will result in the program exceeding its cost cap and delaying the next Discovery-class mission, VERITAS, by at least three years. It also raises the question of whether Discovery missions really have a cost cap, or whether the caps are just recommendations. A recent Discovery mission, InSight, also exceeded its cost cap after issues with the partner-provided instrument resulted in a missed launch window to Mars. The moral hazard caused by specifying a cost cap but not holding missions accountable to that cap is directly applicable to how NASA will manage future astronomy missions after JWST.

These are all issues that we need to remain focused on going forward, but today I am interested in hearing from out expert panel on some of the more interesting results that we have derived from JWST's first year. I look forward to their testimony and yield back the balance of my time.