

House Science, Space, and Technology Committee
Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee
Hearing titled “Returning to the Moon: Keeping Artemis on Track”
Statement by Subcommittee Chairman Brian Babin
Wednesday, January 17, 2024

Good morning. I want to welcome everyone to the Science Committee’s first hearing of 2024. It’s fitting that we’re kicking off the year with a hearing on Artemis, given its importance to our space program and to U.S. competitiveness.

The nation that leads in space earns tremendous scientific knowledge, reaps the rewards of technological advancements, and sets the rules of the road for future exploration. It’s critical that we continue to lead so that our values of transparency, openness, and freedom guide exploration rather than communist principles and dictatorial regimes. That’s why it’s so important for Artemis to succeed.

The origins of the Artemis program stem from President Bush’s Vision for Space Exploration, announced in January of 2004. In 2005, this committee directed NASA to plan to return American astronauts to the Moon as a stepping-stone to Mars and beyond. This committee, and Congress as a whole, has not wavered in its commitment to that goal. All too often NASA programs have suffered from cost over-runs, under-performance, schedule delays, or changing political directions that have led to cancellations. Recognizing this history, Congress has provided “continuity of purpose” for Artemis through multiple NASA Authorization Acts, robust appropriations, and consistent oversight to ensure the program remained focused across several Administrations.

This was no small task, and we still have our work cut out for us to maintain the program and ensure success. I was incredibly pleased to see the success of Artemis’ first mission in November of 2022, which sent an uncrewed Orion capsule around the Moon and back to Earth, where it was successfully recovered in the Pacific Ocean. But last week, NASA announced delays to the Artemis 2 mission, which would send astronauts around the Moon, and the Artemis 3 mission, which would return humans to the lunar surface for the first time in more than 50 years. Artemis 2 has been delayed until September 2025 and Artemis 3 has been pushed back to September 2026. This is in addition to proposed delays to Artemis 4 that were included in the President’s Fiscal Year 2024 budget request last year. While an argument could be made that those schedules were aggressive, it is important for Congress to monitor contract performance and NASA program management to gain insight into trends and indicators that could portend future issues.

Every delay costs the United States time and taxpayer dollars and risks our preeminent role in space exploration. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, we cannot afford to cede U.S. leadership in space, so it’s critical that we keep Artemis on track and on time.

That is the focus of the hearing today. My goal is for this Committee to come away with a better understanding of the current challenges facing Artemis and our efforts to return to the Moon.

There are plenty of topics for us to explore today ranging from acquisition strategies, architecture decisions, concept of operation choices, contractor performance, and NASA oversight. While we will only touch the surface of these complicated issues today, we will surely continue our oversight through additional hearings, information requests, budget reviews, and stakeholder engagement.

Today, however, we have witnesses from NASA, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the NASA Inspector General, and the private sector, all of whom can give us more insight into the program and what's needed to keep it moving forward on time and on budget.

I look forward to their testimony, and discussing how we can ensure future success.

Thank you.

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