



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Joint Hearing of
Space & Aeronautics and Research & Technology Subcommittees:
A Review of the Decadal Survey for Astronomy and Astrophysics in the 2020s

December 1, 2021

Good morning.

Thank you, Chairman Beyer and Chairwoman Stevens, for holding this hearing, and welcome to our distinguished witnesses. We are fortunate to have both co-chairs of the decadal survey before us today. I know we are all eager to hear about the vision for the future and what astronomers hope to learn in the next decade about the Universe and humanity's place within it. I also look forward to discussion of the human and professional side of astronomy and research. Improving access, diversity, and inclusion are critical to the success of scientific research. I am glad, therefore, that the decadal survey spent time on these issues.

The National Academies' decadal surveys are widely respected and highly influential. The astronomy and astrophysics community pioneered the National Academies' decadal survey process in 1964. It is a testament to the value of that process that we are here today, discussing the seventh survey. I congratulate the community on reaching this milestone. Each survey is a monumental effort, with the input and involvement of hundreds of scientists. The effort leads to an independent, peer-reviewed, consensus set of recommended science goals and new programs. Astronomy investments at NASA, NSF, and DOE in the coming decade will be shaped by those recommendations. The surveys ensure that our Nation's science programs are guided by the most compelling science questions and ambitions of the scientific community.

We in Congress spend a lot of time conducting oversight of our federal science programs, particularly when those programs encounter challenges. This is an important role for Congress, as is ensuring the balance of activities necessary for the health of the discipline. We want our Nation's R&D programs to be managed effectively and maximize the scientific return on taxpayer investment.

However, it is also important that we not lose sight of the reason we are here. Why does the U.S. pursue such ambitious, complex programs in the first place? In the last decade alone, astronomers made the first measurements of gravitational waves. Astronomers also discovered that nearly every star in the night sky likely hosts one or more planets. Finally, our investments

in astronomy infrastructure enabled the direct image of a black hole in a nearby galaxy. Discoveries like these and the myriad others, large and small, from astronomical research teach humanity about the universe around us. They also inspire generations to be curious, to explore, and to innovate. What's more, the technological boundaries that astronomers push in computation, optics, and detectors often contribute real societal benefits.

I again want to welcome our expert witnesses, and I look forward to their testimony.

Thank you, and I yield back.