



COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Media Contact: Laura Crist
(202) 225-6371

Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

Charting a Course: Expert Perspectives on NASA's Human Exploration Proposals

Chairman Smith: Americans are fascinated with space exploration. It fuels our desire to push the boundaries of what is possible and to reach beyond our own pale blue dot.

In the last few years, the flagship deep space exploration programs at NASA, both robotic and human, have been under attack by the Obama administration.

This administration cancelled the robotic ExoMars mission and the Constellation program, and it continues to propose drastic cuts to the Space Launch System (SLS) and Orion programs.

These programs were all developed to support deep space exploration to destinations like the Moon and Mars.

The Obama administration cannot claim that it prioritizes Mars exploration if it refuses to prioritize and support the programs that will get us there. And the budget instability created by the administration makes it hard for NASA to plan and execute critical programs.

For example, NASA recently announced that the first crewed mission for SLS and Orion was delayed by two years because the administration would not allow NASA to budget for the programs.

While the administration regularly cuts SLS and Orion budget requests, Congress continues to restore those cuts in a bipartisan fashion. There is bipartisan support within Congress for SLS and the Orion crew vehicle.

This Committee has restored proposed cuts year after year in our authorization bills. And the House and the Senate Appropriations Committees restored funding for the SLS and Orion at the levels necessary to keep their development on track.

The SLS and Orion programs represent what is most impressive about the American spirit – our desire to explore. The technologies that are developed for these programs exemplify our greatest breakthroughs and demonstrate American ingenuity.

This Committee will not permit this administration to threaten the succession of these programs. Any efforts to cancel these programs will be met with stiff opposition.

The administration should develop solid plans for future exploration missions that foster support from the science and engineering communities.

However, the administration continues to push plans for an uninspiring and unjustified Asteroid Retrieval Mission. Just last week, NASA announced its strategy to develop the spacecraft bus that will be used for the robotic elements of the mission.

The administration continues to force this mission on NASA without any connection to a larger exploration roadmap and absent support from the scientific community or NASA's own advisory committees.

This is a misguided mission without a budget, without a launch date, and without ties to exploration goals. It is a mission without the support necessary to make it a reality in the nine months remaining in the Obama administration. It is just a time-wasting distraction but maybe that is what the administration really wants.

Instead, the administration should follow the advice of the NASA Advisory Council and more fully develop its human exploration plans, including a human flyby mission to orbit Mars.

There are many options, but without a roadmap to guide the agency, NASA will continue to be subject to indirection and proposed budget cuts by the White House.

For its part, Congress will continue to ensure that space exploration will receive the funding needed to stay on schedule and on budget.

Great nations do great things. Fortune favors the bold. These next few years are critical. A trip to Mars can turn science fiction into science fact before our eyes and within our lifetime.

The first flag to fly on the surface of Mars should be ours. I hope the administration will join Congress in pursuing that goal.

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