

COMMITTEE ON
**SCIENCE, SPACE, AND
TECHNOLOGY**
CHAIRMAN LAMAR SMITH



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Media Contact: Laura Crist
(202) 225-6371

Statement of Chairman Steven Palazzo (R-Miss.)

An Update on the Space Launch System and Orion: Monitoring the Development of the Nation's Deep Space Exploration Capabilities

Chairman Palazzo: Good morning, I would like to welcome everyone to our hearing and particularly our witnesses. Thank you for your appearance here today.

Anyone who pays attention to the media at all is no doubt aware of the spectacular launch of the Orion crew vehicle last week. I want to congratulate Mr. Gerstenmaier and his entire team at NASA as well as the teams at Lockheed Martin and United Launch Alliance for an outstanding test flight.

While we will hear today about the preliminary results from this test, the scientists and engineers at NASA will continue to analyze the data for quite some time. I look forward to hearing more about the progress of this analysis in the future.

The successful test launch of Orion demonstrates that we are on the right track for sending humans back to the Moon and Mars within our lifetimes. Across the nation people were watching with the same hope and pride that all Americans had in the early days of our space program. In my congressional district children were bussed to Stennis Space Center to watch a live feed of the launch. Events like this are what we need to inspire the next generation of astronauts and engineers; and SLS is a giant leap forward in making America the leader in space once again. The tremendous ongoing work at NASA and our industry partners is beginning to produce tangible results. The nation can be proud of what was accomplished last week. It was certainly a job well done.

The purpose of our hearing today is to examine the challenges and opportunities facing the Space Launch System and Orion programs. It is no secret that this Committee is concerned that the support within NASA for the SLS and Orion is not matched by the Administration. While this lack of commitment is somewhat puzzling, it is not at all surprising. The President has made clear that he does not believe space exploration is a priority for the nation and has allowed political appointees within the administration to manipulate the course of our human space flight program. These decisions should be made by the scientists, engineers, and program managers that have decades of experience in human space flight. As everyone here knows, this is not an easy field, we cannot ramp up capability or prepare for these missions overnight. Space exploration requires a dedication to advance preparation and research, and this committee and this congress are dedicated to supporting that requirement.

The Administration has consistently requested large reductions for these programs despite the insistence of Congress that they be priorities. Most recently, the President's budget for Fiscal Year 2015 included a request to reduce these programs by over \$330 million compared to the Fiscal Year 2014 enacted appropriation. Additionally, in the 2013, 2014, 2015 budget requests, the Administration asked for reductions of \$175.1 million, \$87 million, and \$144.2 million respectively for the Orion program relative to the enacted appropriations.

Had Congress agreed to the requests, Orion and the SLS would have incurred hundreds of millions of dollars in reductions and would likely face significant delays and mass layoffs. Thankfully, Congress listened to the program managers and industry partners to ensure these programs were appropriately funded.

Congress has once again demonstrated support for the SLS and Orion by providing funding well above the president's budget request in the Omnibus for fiscal year 2015. While these priority programs may not enjoy support within the Administration, they certainly do from Congress.

Let me be very clear, on my watch Congress will not agree to gutting the SLS program; not now and not anytime in the foreseeable future.

The human exploration program at NASA has been plagued with instability from constantly changing requirements, budgets, and missions. We cannot change our program of record every time there is a new president. This committee is consistent and unwavering in its commitment to human exploration, a tradition that I appreciate and am confident will continue into the future.

While this hearing is certainly an opportunity for us to celebrate the great progress of the SLS and Orion programs, particularly last week's test flight, the Committee has ongoing concerns about the challenges facing these vital programs. In a letter to the NASA Administrator, Chairman Smith and I expressed our concerns for potential delays of Exploration Mission-1 that had been slated for 2017 and is now potentially delayed to as late as fiscal year 2018. The administration's letter back to the Committee was strangely unresponsive and did not inspire a lot of confidence in NASA's ability to meet the original timelines laid out. Congress needs answers to these questions. At the very least, we need to know, what are the true funding needs and schedule expectations for the development of the SLS and Orion Programs and is NASA on track to meet these expectations?

In addition to consistently submitting insufficient funding requests, the Administration also appears to be limiting the usefulness of funding it does receive. For example, the Administration's treatment of termination liability prevents hundreds of millions of dollars from being used for meaningful development work. Similarly, the committee has learned that the Administration has given direction to the SLS and Orion programs to plan spending rates consistent with the President's Budget Request instead of the higher Continuing Resolution level. Combined, these efforts are undermining the successful development of these national priority programs.

In a recent report titled *Space Launch System - Resources Need to be Matched to Requirements to Decrease Risk and Support Long Term Affordability*, the Government Accountability Office highlighted technical and schedule risks that NASA had not previously brought to the attention of the Committee. Specifically, GAO states that quote "According to the program's risk analysis...the agency's current funding plan for SLS may be \$400 million short of what the program needs to launch by 2017." It was surprising for the Committee to hear about this shortfall since the Administrator had previously testified that quote "If we added \$300 million to the SLS program, you wouldn't know it."

It is not unreasonable for Congress to expect the Administration to be straight forward about the risks and costs associated with national priority programs. As we look to continue pushing towards Mars, we must talk honestly and realistically about these programs and what we can accomplish with them. We want to be partners moving forward, not competitors; unfortunately the Administration has simply not allowed for that cooperation. The test last week of Orion was an important milestone in the future of America's space program. It was a fully commercial mission licensed by the Federal Aviation Administration and conducted by the private sector. In the future, Orion and SLS will serve as the tip of the spear for our nation's space exploration program.

Recently, some have argued that the government shouldn't be involved in space exploration at all and suggest that the private sector alone is capable of leading us into the cosmos. I certainly hope that this will someday be possible, but right now, space exploration requires government support.

This is a worthwhile investment for the taxpayer. It inspires the next generation of explorers to pursue science, technology, engineering, and math; advances U.S. soft power and international relations; reinforces our aerospace industrial base; increases economic competitiveness; and advances our national security interests. Orion and SLS-the vanguard of our nation's space program-are key to advancing these interests. I look forward to hearing from Mr. Gerstenmaier and Ms. Chaplain today about the challenges and opportunities facing these important programs.

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