



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

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Statement from Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)

The Great American Eclipse: To Totality and Beyond

Chairman Smith: In August, millions of Americans turned their eyes to the sky to witness a rare event – a solar eclipse.

The “Great American Eclipse” was a profound experience for anyone fortunate enough to be in the path of totality, and exciting even for those of us who witnessed a partial eclipse. An eclipse is a sight that has inspired previous generations, and one that I hope will inspire a whole new group of young people to study the universe and beyond.

It was an 1878 American eclipse that inspired a young inventor named Thomas Edison. Edison took a trip to Wyoming to view the total eclipse and attempt an experiment to measure the sun’s corona, or outer atmosphere.

The experiment failed, but allegedly inspired him to think about the principles of light and transmission of power. The next year he invented the incandescent electric light bulb.

Who knows what discoveries this year’s eclipse will inspire, but we do know it has rejuvenated an enthusiasm for astronomy, astrophysics and astrobiology.

Thanks to the good work of NASA, NSF and their partners, that enthusiasm was converted into viewing parties, STEM education lessons, and citizen science that engaged millions of Americans.

We have the privilege today of hearing from a panel of witnesses who helped make the day a success for both science and education.

I thank our witnesses, and look forward to seeing their incredible photos and videos, learning what scientific discoveries may come from experiments conducted during the eclipse, and hearing what’s next for solar science.

It is human nature to seek out the unknown and to discover more about the universe around us. We have an extraordinary opportunity to turn enthusiasm for the “Great

American Eclipse" into a renewal for American physics and astronomy that lasts far beyond the two minutes of totality.

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