



For Immediate Release
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**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Hearing on “Next Steps in Human Exploration to Mars and Beyond”**

Chairman Smith: Human history is punctuated by great advancements in the exploration of the world around us. We have long sought out the next frontier, which may well be the exploration of our solar system. No doubt humankind will continue to push the boundaries of the known universe.

Not long ago, the exploration of Mars was considered science fiction. Today, with two active robotic missions on-going, it’s no longer fiction. Space exploration goes beyond rockets and avionics; it is about hope for the future. Human space flight represents the aspirations and ambitions of the American people.

Few sights are more inspiring than when a rocket lifts off a launch pad and disappears into the sky. Investments in the Space Launch System and Orion crew capsule manifest the ingenuity of the American people and the next steps in space exploration.

Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin transfixed America and the world when they landed on the Moon in 1969. The Apollo program was proof that we were not permanently tethered to our home planet. It was a reminder that humans will always be explorers.

As our space program prepares for the next step to Mars, Congress must ensure there is a strategic plan in place. NASA should have a well thought out and convincing plan before committing scarce resources. The trip to Mars will not be a direct one. We will need to train for it before we send a crew, much like the Apollo missions.

One option for training would be a set of lunar missions. Congress has a long history of support for lunar landings and exploration. To me, there is no better way for our astronauts to learn how to live and work on another planet than to use the moon as a training ground. Another option presented by NASA this year is an asteroid retrieval mission. It is difficult to determine what advantages this may offer without a plan to evaluate.

The Administration originally proposed a mission to an asteroid in deep space. A recent National Research Council report found little support for the proposal. Without a consensus for the original plan, NASA haphazardly created a new asteroid retrieval mission. Unfortunately, NASA did not seek the advice of its own Small Bodies Assessment Group before presenting the mission to Congress.

If NASA had sought the advisory group’s advice, they would have heard it was “entertaining, but not a serious proposal.” Maybe that’s why they didn’t ask. As this Committee begins to draft the NASA Reauthorization Act, we must be mindful of the impact it will have on the future. The policies we put in place today will affect our capabilities many years from now.