



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

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Statement by Chairman Brian Babin (R-Texas)

James Webb Space Telescope: Program Breach and its Implications

Chairman Babin: Good morning. Welcome back to our 2nd hearing regarding the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST). As I stated yesterday, I strongly believe in the mission of NASA and commend the tremendous dedication of NASA and the industry team. But as the Chairman of the Space Subcommittee which oversees the agency, it is our responsibility to ensure they, as well as every other government agency, are managing their resources effectively.

However, as this Committee learned in yesterday's hearing, the program and resources relative to JWST have not been managed effectively with fault resting not only with the contractor, but also with NASA and Congress.

In his testimony, Tom Young, Chairman of the Independent Review Board (IRB), addressed many of the issues that led to the cost and schedule breaches with JWST. He also shared significant insight on contributing factors such as the contracting mechanisms used and the expertise of the program management and acquisition personnel.

Administrator Bridenstine provided testimony on NASA's response to the IRB and detailed actions being taken to avoid such development failures in the future. He further conveyed NASA's unwavering commitment to "get these problems solved on the ground"...before the system is launched.

For today's panel, the focus shifts to contractor performance and oversight. More specifically, I want to address implications and concerns over the US space industrial base.

The recent presidential space directives have emphasized the renewed importance of space operations to America's national security, scientific advancements, commercial innovation, and aerospace transportation infrastructure. Across all of these lines of effort, the robustness and resiliency of the space industrial base are critical.

Unfortunately, JWST development shortfalls and numerous other cost and schedule issues with multiple civil and national security space programs have given this Committee reason to be concerned with the health of the US space industrial base.

Since a high-visibility civil space mission like JWST is experiencing avoidable human errors in the workplace and embedded problems with engineering processes at a major aerospace firm, then it is important to ask if more widespread technical issues are occurring within national security space missions and other areas of the US space operations community.

The root causes of these issues need to be discussed today, especially if they are related to insufficient availability of highly-skilled employees and reduced STEM education enrollments affecting recruitment. Likewise, Mr. Young mentioned yesterday that the JWST trade space consists of acceptable risk versus available funding. Thus, we need to ask if the space industrial base is trading too much design resiliency to seek more cost efficiency.

Congress needs to understand the status of JWST today, as well as the plan going forward. Decisions made now can have long lasting implications on future missions. We need to know if the problems being experienced are systemic, based in our acquisition approach, or if they are fundamental management problems in how we plan and execute these larger, multi-year development strategic missions.

I gained significant insight from Administrator Bridenstine and Mr. Young's testimony yesterday. I look forward to Mr. Bush's testimony today, to better understand the perspectives from the JWST prime contractor. It is important to understand their view of the challenges, mistakes, current status, and corrective actions as we move forward. Thank you for your appearance today.

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