



For Immediate Release
February 27, 2014

Media Contacts: Zachary Kurz
(202) 225-6371

**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Hearing on Mars Flyby 2021: The First Deep Space Mission for the Orion and Space Launch System?**

Chairman Smith: At a fundamental level, space exploration—the mission of NASA—is about inspiration. This inspiration fuels our desire to push the boundaries of the possible and reach beyond our own pale blue dot.

For years, I have heard countless stories of how NASA inspired students to study math, chemistry and physics and adults to become scientists and engineers. However, some of these same people now feel that NASA no longer inspires them, their children or grandchildren.

Mankind's first steps on the Moon are a distant memory. And, with the retirement of the Space Shuttle, NASA now is paying Russia \$70 million per seat to transport American astronauts to the International Space Station.

There's a sense that America is falling behind, with our best days behind us. Today, America's finest spaceships and largest rockets are found in museums rather than on launch pads.

Regrettably, the Obama administration has contributed to this situation. Within a few months of taking office, the President canceled NASA's plans to return astronauts to the Moon. And in its place, the President proposed a robotic and human mission to an unnamed asteroid.

NASA's own advisory group on asteroids derided this plan and said, "it was not considered to be a serious proposal."

At a hearing before this Committee, all of the witnesses questioned the merits of the proposed mission. While consensus on Capitol Hill might be hard to find, there is general agreement that the President's asteroid retrieval mission inspires neither the scientific community nor the public, who would foot the bill.

So, what is an inspiring mission? Maybe a journey to Mars. The Red Planet has long intrigued mankind. A Mars Flyby with two astronauts onboard NASA's Orion crew vehicle could use the Space Launch System that NASA is developing.

This flyby would take advantage of a unique alignment between Earth and Mars in 2021 that would include a flyby of the planet Venus. This alignment minimizes the time and energy necessary for a flyby. Under the 2021 proposal, a trip to Mars would take roughly a year and a half instead of two years to three years.

We are not the only nation interested in extending humanity's reach into the Solar System. One of the three major space-faring nations will reach Mars first. The question is whether it will be the U.S. or China or Russia.

Great nations do great things. President Kennedy's call to the nation wasn't just about reaching the Moon, it was a reminder that we are an exceptional nation. We must rekindle within NASA the fire that blazed the trail to the moon.

The future of this nation's exploration efforts lead to Mars. The first flag to fly on another planet in our solar system should be that of the United States.

NASA, the White House, and Congress should consider this Mars Flyby mission proposal. It will focus NASA's energy and talent over the next decade, and most importantly, it will inspire our nation.

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