

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



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**Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)**

*Exploration of the Solar System: From Mercury to Pluto and Beyond*

**Chairman Smith:** The exploration of our universe captures Americans' interests, inspires us to pursue extraordinary goals, and keeps us on the forefront of scientific achievement. It also is what NASA was created to do.

Since 1958, NASA has led the world in space exploration with a long list of firsts: NASA built, launched, and operated the first spacecraft to encounter another planet, the first spacecraft to leave our solar system, and the first spacecraft to take humans to the Moon.

Earlier this month, the New Horizons spacecraft achieved another American first by being the first spacecraft to reach Pluto.

The photos and data sent back to Earth continue to capture the imagination of people around the world. These pictures show mountains of water ice, caverns deeper than the Grand Canyon, and evidence of geologic activity.

And while we may not resolve debates about Pluto's planetary status today, at least one thing is for certain: Pluto has heart!

And this is just the beginning. It will take up to 16 months for all of the data from the Pluto system flyby to be downloaded.

NASA, the Southwest Research Institute, the Applied Physics Laboratory, and the New Horizons team deserve our appreciation for the successful mission to Pluto.

NASA also has ongoing missions to explore Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and the asteroid belt. The Dawn mission to Ceres and Vesta continues to transmit impressive images and important science.

Juno is on its way to Jupiter, scheduled to arrive next year, and pave the way for a future mission to Europa. These missions are the result of investments made a decade ago or longer.

It is crucial that NASA continue to explore our solar system. Planetary science teaches us about how our solar system works and provides clues about how it was formed.

Planetary missions discover the locations of minerals and potential water sources on asteroids, comets, moons, and planets that could be used on human missions or extracted for use here on Earth.

Space exploration inspires the next generation of young people to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and math.

Today, young students across the country are reading about New Horizons, looking at pictures of Pluto, and are excited about one day exploring the cosmos themselves and making new discoveries.

Unfortunately, the Obama Administration's past and present proposed cuts to planetary science and exploration at NASA have made it clear these endeavors are not its priority. The Administration's Fiscal Year 2016 request cut funding for planetary science by \$77 million from Fiscal Year 2015 levels.

Our Committee's NASA Authorization Act for FY16 and FY17 restores these crucial funds to the science and exploration accounts.

Funding levels requested by the Obama administration would slow the rate at which we can develop, build and launch new missions like New Horizons. This Committee's bill, and the funding levels approved in the House, would allow NASA to keep planetary missions like New Horizons on track.

I urge the Administration to support this common sense, balanced, and reasonable approach, which will keep us on the forefront of space exploration and discovery.

I thank the witnesses for being here today and look forward to hearing their testimony.

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