



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

For Immediate Release
September 27, 2016

Media Contact: Kristina Baum
(202) 225-6371

Statement of Space Subcommittee Chairman Brian Babin (R-Texas)
Are We Losing the Space Race to China?

Chairman Babin: After the *Columbia* accident, President George W. Bush sought to revitalize our nation's space program by challenging NASA to return to the Moon and then chart a course for Mars. Steady advances were made towards those goals with strong Congressional support for the Constellation Program. NASA made solid progress towards the development of the Ares 1 and Ares 5 vehicles. The Commercial Cargo program was initiated and the International Space Station neared completion.

All of that success came to a screeching halt when President Obama was sworn in. His FY2010 budget request slashed well over a billion dollars from the exploration budget. He then tasked a blue ribbon commission to evaluate NASA's current plans. The panel found that the original plan was not executable, something that should have come as no surprise given the Obama administration's budget cut. President Obama cancelled Constellation in its next budget request, redirected even more money to Earth Science to support its radical political agenda, and guaranteed dependence on Russia for access to space for an extended period of time.

So what does this have to do with China? Well, this vacuum of leadership has led not only to extended dependence on Russia for access to space, but also facilitated the ascendance of China as a leading spacefaring nation. China has capitalized on this administration's weakness by offering partnerships with other nations on missions, like a return to the Moon, which the U.S. chose to walk away from. Rather than charting a bold course that inspires the international community to engage with us, the Obama administration has alienated historic allies and potential partners alike. Only because of Congress is NASA building deep space exploration capabilities. Unfortunately, the administration refuses to let NASA show any detailed plans for a "Journey to Mars" beyond a PowerPoint chart. China, on the other hand, has demonstrated a willingness to answer calls for collaboration with open arms. This has clearly strengthened their soft power and international standing.

China's near-term plans for space exploration continue their nation's philosophy of steady and measured progress, but their long-term goals are ambitious. They have already placed astronauts in orbit five times, launched a space station, and placed a rover on the Moon. They have announced plans for a larger space station, a first-of-a-kind mission to the far side of the Moon, and potentially a manned mission to the Moon in the 2030s.

The administration's abdication of leadership in space exploration has significant consequences.

If we do not lead, someone else will. Leadership in space means security, technological prowess, and innovation. Our future prosperity depends on our leadership in space.

If we do not lead, we will not set the terms and condition for those who follow. When the U.S. explores and embarks on adventures of discovery, we take with us our ideologies and principles. I, for one, want to ensure that space becomes a domain of freedom and liberty, not autocracy and oppression.

If we do not lead, we will weaken our partnerships. I want countries to embark with us into the cosmos, rather than team with China as a last resort. The Obama administration has already told the Europeans that that they are not interested in their Moon Village proposal. They've tried to walk away from their commitments to the Germans on SOFIA and actually abandoned ExoMars. International partners have memories. They also have options. China is building a resume of accomplishments that positions them as a viable alternative.

Given their recent provocative actions in the South China Sea, and the long-standing oppression of their own people, we should all be wary of perpetuating conditions that push other nations to partner with China. Furthermore, we should ensure that any U.S. cooperation with China in space is mutually beneficial, appreciates the risk of technology exploitation, and fits into a larger strategic perspective that recognizes Chinese provocation.

Aside from recent tensions in the South China Sea, China also threatens our nation's cyber security. Couple that with their irresponsible antisatellite tests, and one is hard-pressed to find a reason to reward their behavior with increased cooperation.

We may not be in a space race with China. We may not even be competing with China in space, but the strategic choices we make clearly impact China's space capabilities – something that we should all pay attention to given that China's civil space activities are inseparable from their military.

I look forward to our witnesses' testimony, and thank them for appearing.

###