

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



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**Statement of Space Subcommittee Chairman Steven Palazzo (R-Miss.)
Hearing on “Next Steps in Human Exploration to Mars and Beyond”**

Chairman Palazzo: Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to recognize Astronaut Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, who was honored last night at the Kennedy Center for her tireless work promoting the nation’s space program and her devotion to STEM education for our nation’s children.

Over the last decade, the human exploration program at NASA has been plagued with instability from constantly changing requirements, budgets, and missions. We can’t continue changing our program of record every time there is a new President. This Committee is consistent and unwavering in its commitment to human exploration, a tradition that I am confident will continue into the future. Congress issued steady guidance in the 2005 and 2008 Authorization Acts that directed NASA to base exploration progress on availability of funds.

In accordance with the Authorization Act of 2010, NASA is developing the most powerful exploration vehicle and advanced crew capsule since the Apollo era. The SLS and Orion will take our astronauts deeper into space than ever before. I am committed to the success of these assets and ensuring their continued on-time development and appropriate prioritization moving forward. I, and many on this Committee, are frustrated that the Administration insists on cutting its funding request for the SLS and Orion. Reductions in these programs make me question the Administration’s sincere commitment to their success. If nothing else comes out of this hearing, I hope it is clear to those inside and outside the Administration that this Committee is devoted to human exploration and we intend to ensure this year’s authorization reflects that commitment.

Numerous studies and commissions have provided Congress with recommendations for purposes and goals for exploring space. We don’t need another study, we need action.

As we move forward in the next few months with the NASA Authorization Act, Congress must address our path to Mars and beyond so there will be no question as to where we are headed and how we will get there.

As we venture further into the solar system there must be a plan in place for the capabilities, skills, and technologies needed to land humans on Mars and return them safely to the Earth. Today we will discuss the best way to take our first steps toward Mars and the path we should follow to get there. The two most commonly referenced possibilities for next steps are an asteroid mission and a lunar mission. We have a panel of experts with us today that will be able to speak to both of these options. The last three NASA Authorization Acts have created a clear legislative record supporting a return to the Moon with a sustained human presence as a training ground for venturing further into the solar system.

There are many advantages to returning humans to the Moon and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about what we may gain from a return to the surface of our closest celestial neighbor. Additionally, this year the Administration proposed to capture an asteroid and move it to a nearby orbit as a technology demonstration and exploration training opportunity. Prior to this year, NASA had not presented Congress with any indication such a mission would be in development. I still have many questions about the budget profile, technical plan, schedule, and long-term strategy as NASA has yet to even complete a mission formulation review.

I am not convinced this mission is the right way to go and that it may actually prove a detour for a Mars mission. Today we have one of the scientists who wrote the study which became the basis of the asteroid mission, and I look forward to hearing his thoughts.

Human exploration has always had its challenges, but the United States has always risen to the occasion. This country was built by people who dream big and do the hard things. I believe the decisions we make today will determine whether the U.S. maintains its leadership in space tomorrow. In the future, as in the past, I hope we will be able to focus mission priorities and goals to ensure our best chances of success.