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The House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology met on February 3 to outline steps for future human exploration on the Moon and Mars. Witnesses Tom Young of the Goddard Space Flight Center, John C. Sommerer of the National Academy of Sciences, and Paul Spudis of the Lunar and Planetary Institute, provided testimony with various perspectives on human exploration in deep space.

Chairman Brian Babin (R-TX) called for a well defined mission plan and budget at NASA, and raised concerns about making the missions sustainable and creating a roadmap for the future of space flight.

Young testified that a budget increase will be necessary for future projects, and that NASA has not made a decision on whether to pursue a human mission to the Moon or Mars. Young also explained that a roadmap is needed to create a common focus for the program, define the technology, information, and resources required for missions, and assess potential risks. Sommerer testified that, given current funding levels and today's technology, it is unlikely that humans will get to Mars before 2050, if at all.

Sommerer also addressed the risks to astronaut health associated with deep space exploration. Spudis called for the need to invest in short-term space goals, and focus on exploring cislunar space – space that is between the Earth and the Moon – and mineral exploration on the moon.

The committee and witnesses also discussed private companies raising capital for space exploration, and what role federal regulation should play. They also discussed robotic exploration as an alternative to human exploration, and the challenges of maintaining continuity within the NASA space program with the upcoming presidential election.

Sources: House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology
