

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell, Chair

**U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Space and Science
Subcommittee Hearing: NASA Accountability and Oversight**

February 9, 2022

TRANSCRIPT: Cantwell Opening Statement at Hearing

[VIDEO](#)

“Thank you so much [Sen. Lummis] and Chair Hickenlooper for holding this important hearing. I want to say a thanks to you and the efforts of the committee to get these witnesses in front of us...and thank my colleague, Senator Wicker, for the work that we did in including a NASA Authorization as part of the America COMPETES Act, or as we passed it in the Senate, the US Innovation and Competition Act.

“And so we're here today to talk about NASA and its future.

“Like many of the members of this committee, you start off with how involved your state is in space, and Washington state is no exception. We have been involved in everything from Boeing, its responsibility for the International Space Station, to the Space Launch System. Both SpaceX and Blue Origin are in the state of Washington. Many other companies have been part of the Space Operations for a long time now...and organizations like Rocketdyne and many others.

“And I always say there's a reason why we have something called the Space Needle. We're just very interested in space in the northwest.

“But we're at a point where NASA is expanding the use of these more commercially oriented agreements for human exploration, for scientific discovery. And last year, NASA awarded over \$400 million to three companies to develop a commercial replacement to the International Space Station.

“These issues are very important to us. And in my opinion, part of our competitiveness issues, because of the leading role that NASA plays in helping us keep our leading role in aviation. That is in aviation competitiveness as it relates to next generation aircraft...frankly, our competitiveness as it relates to LEOs and our satellite systems, and in the future of space, space safety, and other issues related to national security.

“So, to me, we're at a point where we need to get authorization of NASA so that we can continue to do our job. And we need to do that as part of the conference that we are going to be working on, Senator Wicker and I.

“The Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel, the General Accounting Office and NASA's Office of Inspector General have highlighted issues related to NASA's management and oversight of missions. And that's why I think it's so important to have an authorizing bill.

"If this is such a critical mission for our country, if this is such a critical competitiveness issue, we can't wait five years for an authorization. We need the authorization and our committee needs to continue to do our oversight role.

"That oversight role is on both traditional acquisitions and more commercial partnerships. Programs like James Webb Telescope, which NASA successfully deployed last year, have issues of cost overrun and schedule and GAO first designated NASA's management as a high-risk area in 1990, due to its history of [persistent] cost and growth, schedule slippage in a majority of its larger systems.

"Both ASAP and NASA inspector general have critiqued NASA's lack of comprehensive and accurate cost estimates that account for all of Artemis programs. And the ASAP and GAO in particular have called for improved top-level management of Artemis and greater transparency on cost schedule, and decision-making processes. So, the purpose of this hearing is to examine what are those best practices for the management of that system.

"The message must be clear, regardless of the type of private sector partnership, when it comes to maximizing safety, managing risk, and minimizing cost and schedule growth, the execution and the national vision for SpaceX exploration: The buck stops with NASA. And so we have to figure out the way we're going to play our oversight role. Hard to play an oversight role without getting an authorization and making sure that our goals are set in that authorization.

"So obviously, NASA is ultimately accountable for those safe operations and technical excellence and delivering for its customers. And the amount of transformation that is continuing to happen. We learned very much from the 737 Max issues that system failures within the FAA's oversight caused us challenges. And we're now getting into this area of where we're really going to start thinking about commercial exploration.

"So we're excited about NASA's future. We're excited about the mission. We're excited about our competitiveness as a nation in this particular, very important area of the US economy. But we need to get an authorization bill and we need to have frequent authorizations, at least every five years, approved by Congress.

"This notion of going through the Appropriations Committee without the mission, the commitment, the foresight -- I would say to you is also why we haven't been able to always get the budget we want to see, because we haven't got everybody on board on the importance of this mission.

"Trust me, when you look at the overall budget for NASA, the numbers are not that great compared to all of the other things that we're doing in the federal government. When you look at the investment that we're making on those issues that I've just mentioned, aviation excellence, securing our future, the LEO and communication

system, I guarantee you it's worth the investment. So let's figure out how we get this leadership to move forward and look forward to hearing from the panel today and having a chance to ask questions.

“Thank you.”