

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Opening Statement at Committee Hearing
“There’s a Bad Moon on the Rise: Why Congress and NASA Must Thwart
China in the Space Race”
September 3, 2025
[\[VIDEO\]](#)

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I'm glad to join you today in this fight to say we must maintain our focus on returning to the moon. It's good to see the witnesses here, Mr. Cutler, Mr. Gold, Mr. Bridenstine and Lieutenant General Shaw. But also want to recognize Bill Nye, also a Northwest Planetary Society individual who is here today as well. I look forward to all of your testimony.

Today we're here in a race with China to return to the moon and stay there. Beating China back to the moon isn't just about bragging rights, and it's certainly not just about grabbing headlines. But today, it's clear that President Xi, President Putin and Prime Minister Modi are all in China having a big national security and strategic discussion that could easily, easily include space and defense and security and defense implications.

No surprise actually, that Kim Jong Un is also there. Let's just take for a consideration that he would like to figure out how to improve his rocket technology with more accuracy, more distance, more tracking. I don't like the scenario. The strategic value of maintaining our position to live and work in space is critical. It's critical to our future economic and national security. Returning to the moon requires us to push the limits of technology to find the solutions that we can solve and maintain our national defense and innovation economy. All you have to do is look back to the 1960s and look at the development of technologies that created an ecosystem within the United States of America that led to discoveries and innovations that we're still now counting on today.

So, we must not waver in this important mission of technology and national security defense. I believe each of the witnesses will tell us something about this today and why the consequences of failing to achieve this goal will be monumental. We know we need to go back to the moon, and we know we need to go there before China establishes a permanent presence. I want to hear – importantly—about the expertise these individuals think that we must pull together so that we won't fall short of this goal. It's clear in some of your testimony, you're already articulating the strategic advantage China has of being so uniform on their government structure. We, on the other hand, are trying to work both within the government and within the commercial sector, on a partnership that allows all of us to creatively work together and move forward.

That is why, Lieutenant General Shaw, I found your statement in your testimony quite compelling; quote, “I believe if we do not unify and synchronize our efforts, we will find ourselves rather than the space leaders we are today, instead in a position of increasing disadvantage in space as we progress further into this century.” End quote, I don't want to see that reality either. I want us to explore how to get the most out of NASA's commercial partnership and determine if sufficient redundancy in the provisions of commercial space are there to ensure that.

The state of Washington plays a very proud role in the exploration of space and the space economy -- about 77,000 people employed today, just in the space economy, obviously, more than 100,000 employed in aerospace in general. So these are important companies to us, Aerojet Rocketdyne, Boeing, Blue Origin, all working on rocket infrastructure, crew capsules, Gateway lunar landing orbit station and human landers. All of these are so important.

And also just a shout out to the returning Colonel Anne McClain from Spokane, who just returned from serving as the [Crew] Commander on the ISS mission from March through August of this year. So yes, we have a lot of people thinking about space in the Northwest.

So, I am concerned about the current plan and what we are doing to make sure that we continue to push forward. I would love to see the continued focus on dual landers, given how important they are going to be for the future. It's not just one time. It's many times. This is an operation where we're going to continue to return and be an operational system. So I want to make sure that we have the best. I want to make sure that NASA has backup plans that takes advantage and ensures that the already delayed mission does not slip any further.

I don't know that it takes a genius to figure out that while China may be projecting 2030, or some time period, there's nothing to say that they won't go sooner. There are people we talked to in trying to brief the press about this today, who are betting that they are going to go sooner and that they are going to beat us. So we don't need another Sputnik moment. It's already happened. The only thing we have to do is make sure we in Congress get the budget right and support the Artemis mission. I appreciate everything the Chair has done in putting money towards the Artemis mission, and I appreciate everything that we are doing collectively to assure that the administration spins it.

But I also want to point out that, as Lieutenant General Shaw also says, this whole cislunar communication architecture -- that is the space between the Earth and the Moon -- that is what China would love to do, go dominate the communication system between the [Earth] and the moon. That's what they're already working on. We can't allow that to happen. We need to continue to move forward quickly, fastly, with these investments, because our national security and defense depends on it.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to asking the witnesses more detailed questions about this, the President's budget, and why we need to make sure that we are funding this appropriate mission for the future, not just of our innovation, but also for our national security. Thank you.