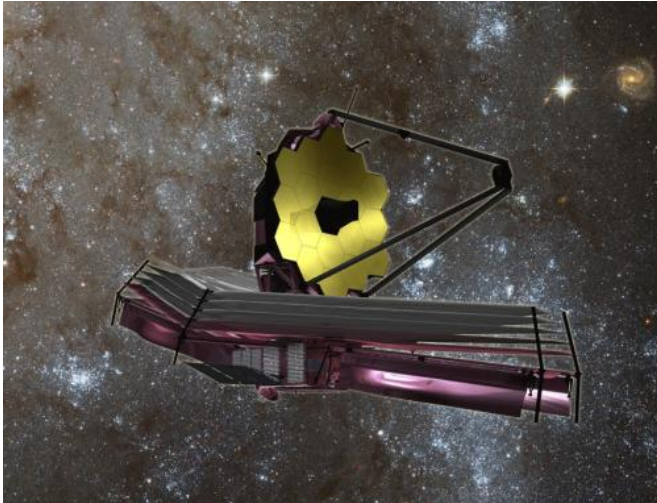


US lawmakers vote to kill Hubble successor

7 July 2011



Artist impression of the James Webb telescope. Credit: NASA

In a fresh blow to NASA's post-shuttle aspirations, key US lawmakers voted Thursday to kill off funding for the successor to the vastly successful space-gazing Hubble telescope.

The US House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science approved by voice vote a yearly spending bill that includes no money for the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST).

The move -- spurred on by belt-tightening in cash-strapped Washington -- still requires the full committee's approval, the full House's approval, the Senate's approval, and ultimately President Barack Obama's signature.

But the relatively mild dissents in the committee, which said in a terse statement this week that the project "is billions of dollars over budget and plagued by poor management," suggests the JWST faces an uphill fight to survive.

The vote struck a blow at the National Aeronautics

and Space Administration's goals with the space shuttle program about to end after 30 years, and Obama's decision to axe a new plan to return astronauts to the moon.

NASA plans to lay out a budget that "will allow us to launch the Webb telescope in this decade," deputy administrator Lori Garver told reporters at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

"We will be working with Congress to assure them we can manage this program and develop the most amazing space telescope," she said, calling the JWST "a perfect example of reviewing the unknown and reaching for new heights."

In February, NASA Inspector General Paul Martin told lawmakers the JWST had careened billions of dollars over budget.

Initial estimates put the cost of the telescope, designed to help the hunt for knowledge about early galaxies in the universe, at \$1.6 billion, but now the total price tag has ballooned to \$6.5 billion, he said.

NASA has repeatedly pushed back the telescope's launch date, now set for 2018 at the earliest.



A full scale model of the James Webb Space Telescope sits on the National Mall outside the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, in 2007. In a fresh

blow to NASA's post-shuttle aspirations, key US lawmakers voted Thursday to kill off funding for the successor to the vastly successful space-gazing Hubble telescope.

The project, initially named the Next Generation Space Telescope, is designed to look deeper into space than the Hubble Telescope, and would also venture farther than the Earth-orbiting Hubble, launched in 1990.

Some Democrats on the panel voted against the bill, and lawmakers often wait until the full committee takes up legislation to offer amendments to protect cherished projects.

The vote came one day after Obama, in an unprecedented question and answer session with Twitter users, said NASA needs new technology breakthroughs to revitalize its mission to explore the universe.

"We are still a leader in space exploration, but, frankly, I have been pushing NASA to revamp its vision," Obama said, as the shuttle Atlantis geared up for its final mission.

Obama, who axed NASA's Constellation program that would have sent astronauts back to the moon, said the United States should move beyond the space travel models it used in the Cold War-era race to the moon in the 1960s.

JWST is an international collaboration grouping NASA, the European Space Agency (ESA), and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).

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