

"Webb Telescope: Progress and Problems"

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It's no secret that the James Webb Space Telescope has fallen on hard times. The U.S. House of Representatives recently released its 2012 appropriations bill, proposing to cut NASA's funding to \$16.8 billion. This amount is \$1.6 billion less than last year and \$1.9 billion below what President Obama had requested. The bill specifically eliminates funding for the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), the Hubble Space Telescope's successor, citing its higher-than-expected costs and "poor management."

All the same, preparations for the launch of the JWST – now scheduled for 2018 – seem to be on track. Astronomers at the U.K.'s Rutherford Appleton Laboratory (RAL) have finished testing the Mid-InfraRed Instrument MIRI, one of the four devices that will analyze the light collected by the Webb telescope's 21-foot-wide (6.5-m) main mirror. The RAL engineers subjected the MIRI to extremely low temperatures – 388 degrees F (40 kelvins) – for 86 days, simulating conditions in space.

"The successful completion of the test program, involving more than 2,000 individual tests, marks a major milestone for the Webb telescope mission," says Matthew Greenhouse, project scientist for the telescope's science instruments at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland.

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