

**Statement of Senator David Vitter**  
**Augustine Review Panel**  
**Wednesday, June 17, 2009**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss not only recent congressional authorization activity that I believe should have a profound influence on the outcome of your study, but also to discuss the specific effects that the transition to our next generation of human spaceflight will have on my constituents in Louisiana who work at both Michoud Assembly Facility and the Stennis Space Center.

The future of our space flight program will be affected in many ways by the outcome of this study, and taking time out of your personal life to undertake such a huge responsibility is commendable.

I will begin my statement by discussing the NASA 2005 and 2008 Authorization Acts, both of which reflected a coming together of minds in House and Senate for the common goal of promoting human spaceflight and the necessity that the United States retain its leadership position in the international space community through action. Specifically, both bills express support for the goal of returning to the Moon, but this time to conduct sustained human exploration, which we did not do in the Apollo program. Both bills also express strong support for the completion of the International Space Station and the continued utilization of the station in order to maximize the substantial investment in both time and resources that the United States and specifically NASA have made. In support of this position, the 2005 Act designated the space station as a National Laboratory, and began its evolution to a facility that not only can meet NASA's research needs, but those of other government agencies, educational consortia, and private research and development concerns.

Both bills expressed the very real concerns of the Congress regarding the pending gap in US human spaceflight capability. As a side note I believe it is important to note that this gap is in no way mandated by technical, engineering, structural or systemic issues, but by a zero-sum budget plan that would require transferring the funds being spent on the shuttle to the efforts to develop its replacement vehicles, the Ares launch vehicles and the Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle. This is a voluntary gap being imposed on our space program, and will only begin when we voluntarily retire the space shuttle.

Adequate authorized funding levels were provided in both bills, that, if they had been requested and appropriated over the past four years, would most likely have made significant headway toward shortening the projected gap. Both bills displayed an understanding of the difficulties associated with transitioning to our next generation of human spaceflight, as well as the pitfalls and impacts that will affect our highly qualified and unique workforce that we have supporting human spaceflight in this country.

The potential loss of many of those skilled resources including civil servants, contractors and suppliers across the country, I believe is a significant part of the “Gathering Storm” that a previous study headed by your Chairman outlined so clearly. The long term implications of the loss of this skilled workforce will not only affect places in my part of the country, like Michoud Assembly Facility and Stennis Space Center, but across a wide range of the country’s industrial capabilities.

We have lost hundreds of workers already at the Michoud Assembly Facility in Louisiana. More job cut announcements are expected later this summer, and I think we owe these dedicated and hard working individuals an answer on what the next generation of spaceflight is going to be for us so that they may make informed decisions about their future in their chosen professions. None of us want to see these workers leave this field. I fear we are going to face a very harsh reality in the near future when we are ready to begin production of the main aspects of the Constellation program and we find ourselves lacking the most important part of the process, the workforce. The simple fact is that NASA already has its chosen “Centers of Excellence”, as well as other vital centers like Michoud, and the massive job losses that most of these centers are going to be subjected to will not leave a viable, highly skilled, workforce in those regions. It is unreasonable, and unfair of us to expect these workers to either stay in these areas when they don’t have sufficient high-technology job prospects in the immediate vicinity. It is also irresponsible to expect these workers to be at our beck and call to return when we have gotten around to sufficiently funding the Exploration program to the extent that work can ramp back up at the NASA centers. These people are the lifeblood of NASA, and we owe them far more than hazy timelines, vague prospects for future employment, and non-existent job security at their current positions. I will be approaching the next NASA Authorization with these concerns foremost in my mind and I encourage this panel to approach their duties with the same concerns in mind.

I want to stress my sincere belief that any and all possible options and alternatives should be considered during this review. I think that this all inclusive philosophy toward considering options for the next generation of human spaceflight is the best way to ensure that the United States retains its position as the world leader in space exploration. The Federal Advisory Committee Act, under which this panel has been convened, requires an independent review, free of limitations or influence by the organizations whose programs you are asked to review. It is vital that your review be unconstrained by any bounding consideration, whether budgetary or programmatic. I believe I can speak for my fellows in both the House and the Senate when I say that the Administration must be given a clear picture of what is attainable and what resources would be required for all different options for continuation of human spaceflight. Only then will we be in a proper position to make the judgments that will result in the best possible solution for the American taxpayers, who have invested so much of their hard earned money in this country’s commitment to space exploration.

I know that our staff has prepared a collection of the relevant language, supporting and related information from NASA, the General Accountability Office and the Congressional Budget Office, and a broader description of the issues and concerns we have addressed and continue to address as we draft a 2009 Authorization bill, and that this information will be provided to you. They will be available to provide any further detailed information you feel is needed.

Again, I want to thank you for your commitment to this enormous task, and look forward to seeing the result of your efforts and joining with the Administration and my colleagues in the Congress to derive the best possible path forward to sustain an essential national asset and preserve our country's leadership in space.