

Statement of U.S. Representative Bill Posey (FL-15)

The U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee

July 30, 2009

Cocoa Beach, Florida

Mr. Augustine and members of the Committee:

Welcome to America's Space Coast. The history of America's ventures in space exploration is intertwined with this region in east-central Florida, and you will not find a more dedicated, accomplished and hardworking workforce anywhere in the world than those you meet here who work to ensure the Space Shuttle safely completes its scheduled manifests.

Your task is paramount. You have the ability to shape the future of America's human space flight program for generations to come. Your charter gives you a rare opportunity "to identify and characterize the range of options that spans the reasonable possibilities for continuation of U.S. human space flight activities beyond retirement of the Shuttle." With limited time and resources at your disposal, and to be of practical use for policymakers, your report cannot help but convey that some courses of action will be far more promising than others for the United States to maintain its leadership in space.

By virtue of your expertise, you, the members of this committee, will appreciate the thousands of benefits and spinoffs derived from America's efforts in space exploration. However, the overwhelming abundance of NASA spinoffs—cell phones, laptops, GPS—to name a few, have meant that many Americans take for granted or fail to realize altogether how space exploration directly touches their lives and benefits them. Your review, upon which major decisions are expected to be based, has the potential to determine whether cutting-edge technology of the future will be pioneered by the United States or by a foreign power. As we know, the international competition is real and it is fierce. Importantly, we all realize the vital implications at stake in regards to our national security: whoever dominates space will control what security we have here on earth.

Our international competitors are already nipping at our heels. Russia, China, India, and others are challenging our position as the world leader in space. Who would have thought that what the Wright brothers began more than 100 years ago would have led the United States to world preeminence in aerospace, and that it would be our nation's leading export. We should not and cannot afford to surrender this leadership to others. We must press the envelope and lead the world. Not for the sake of national pride but because it is an integral part of our future and will inspire future generations of Americans.

Remember that what the Wright brothers accomplished was more than just set our nation to flight. They inspired a generation and that generation gave vision to the next. President Kennedy, like the Wright brothers, inspired a generation with his vision of "landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth." As young man, I was inspired by that vision and joined thousands of other Americans to work on the Apollo program to see the vision fulfilled. We did it. Forty years ago, almost to the day, we succeeded.

But in the wake of that victory, tens of thousands of us received our pink slips. As we approach the “space gap” and our dependence on the Russians for access to the space station, we must be careful not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Our talented workforce cannot simply be laid off and then rehired a few years later. I speak from personal experience. I watched the exodus from this very community as our nation’s space team had no option but to move away.

Regardless of the path decided, the transition is unlikely to be seamless in regards to the thousands of men and women on the Space Coast who have the skill set essential to assuring American access to space. To that end, I believe it is critical that your report highlight options to minimize, as much as possible, the gap with the Shuttle’s successor program, presumably Constellation, in the interest of maintaining our skilled human space flight workforce.

While directed by the charter to undertake your study “within the current budget profile for NASA exploration activities” I encourage you to note that this consideration falls after the greater priorities of “(1) expediting a new U.S. capability to support utilization of the International Space Station; (2) supporting missions to the Moon and other destinations beyond low Earth orbit; [and] (3) stimulating commercial space flight capabilities.”

As a legislator, I remind you that budgets are subject to change, often arbitrary, but good public policy calls for their alignment with the public’s priorities. Space exploration is the one thing for which the United States is undeniably, unequivocally, and universally respected around the world. If we as a nation are serious about maintaining our leadership in space and wish to continue as a beneficiary of space exploration, then policy decisions will depend on your judgment to accentuate the possibilities that best fit our nation overall, notwithstanding hypothetical budgets of the future. Budgets are a reality, but proper leadership can and should match the budget to a worthy mission—not the mission to the budget. I, and many of my colleagues in Congress, look forward to reviewing your report and to see within the range of options some that call for additional funding if current budgetary trends are insufficient to accomplish our space objectives as a nation.

This commission should fully explore options beyond the limiting restraints of an arbitrary budget number that has been placed upon NASA. Our nation’s NASA budget is \$18.8 billion out of a total \$3.6 trillion dollar budget. This amounts to less than one-half of one percent of the entire federal budget.

Consider in totality all the benefits that our nation’s space program will bring to the next generation of Americans. What is the vision of today’s youth? I would say to you, the members of this commission, you will play a large role in writing the answer to that question.

Consider what vision you will lay out for the next generation of Americans. Let’s look forward and do what is right. The leaders of tomorrow are looking to be inspired—don’t disappoint them.

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