

**Testimony of U.S. Senator Mel Martinez
NASA Augustine Commission
July 30, 2009**

Few endeavors have captured our imagination as much as human space flight. The urge to explore is uniquely human and the desire to push the limits of human space exploration is uniquely American. Just last week, we celebrated the 40th Anniversary of Apollo's successful mission to the moon – a milestone for our space program.

As former Administrator Michael Griffin wrote on the Anniversary, it is strange to celebrate a scientific and technological accomplishment we are no longer capable of replicating. Less than 70 years separated the Wright brothers' first flight and our nation's lunar landing, yet somehow in the decades since we have failed to move forward.

The United States has been a world leader in aeronautics and spaceflight for generations, and we are just now completing work on the International Space Station – an endeavor requiring complex international coordination, consuming tremendous time and resources. This lab is now prepared to assist us in our efforts to continue the exploration of space, and it should be used that way. The ISS was not supposed to be an end in itself, it is supposed to help leverage and advance our scientific knowledge to assist further space exploration.

The mission of the International Space Station needs to be extended beyond its current termination date of 2015. But its extension should not be used as justification to limit investments in exploration activities beyond lower earth orbit. As soon as possible, the ISS' supply and manning requirements should be turned over to the commercial sector. Such a move would strengthen the commercial launch industry in the United States and provide additional room for growth for the companies invested in this area of our economy.

Our nation's space program is at a crossroads. As you consider options for the future of American manned spaceflight and the various architectures available, I believe it is important to remember how we arrived here. For too long, NASA has lacked focus and Congress has provided unstable and inadequate funding for the Administration. No recommendations from this commission will be successful if these two issues are not effectively addressed.

There are a number of important decisions that this commission, the new NASA Administrator, and the Obama Administration must make soon that directly impact America's status as a global space leader. These questions include: should we continue flying the shuttle? Should we continue moving forward with the Constellation Systems Program? Should we continue with the same launch architectures, or consider starting over? Should we return to the Moon? Or should we send a manned vehicle to Mars? All of these decisions have consequences, and it is incumbent upon the Obama administration to weigh the options and make the appropriate choices.

As a Senator from Florida, I feel a special pride in the work that is done at the Kennedy Space Center, and I strongly support increasing any opportunities for human space flight. The following are my recommendations for the Commission as you continue your study.

Just as the Obama Administration has suggested, the remaining Space Shuttle flights should be completed without setting hard time limits to avoid mistakes that could result from pressure to launch. At the same time, I do not believe that the Shuttle program should be extended beyond the current manifest. While such an extension could help to limit job losses in the short term, I am concerned it could further delay progress on development of our next heavy lift launch vehicle. Further delay of our next heavy lift launch vehicle could have a devastating long-term impact on the Space Coast and our nation's space program. Instead, I believe that it is in our best interest to expedite the development of our next manned heavy launch vehicle to mitigate these job losses and retain as many of these talented workers as possible.

With regard to the decision on the proper launch vehicle architecture, I am not an aerospace engineer, so I will leave the physics and engineering debates to those more qualified. On the other hand, as a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, I have seen first-hand the costs and delays of major weapons systems brought on by constantly shifting requirements. The Constellation Systems Program was studied and chosen after careful review. While no Administration should have its decisions dictated to it by its predecessor, I believe that changing requirements and moving to a different architecture at this point would increase costs and likely delay the successful launch of our next heavy lift launch vehicle.

In terms of where we explore, I support the current mission of returning to the moon, a manned mission to Mars, and the exploration of other near-earth objects. This vision of exploration has been endorsed by Congress twice, once by a Republican-controlled Congress, and again three years later by a Democrat-controlled Congress. While this vision of space exploration clearly has the endorsement of the Congress, it has not received the necessary funding from the Appropriations Committees. Nor has it received adequate funding in the budgets produced by the Bush Administration or the Obama Administration. If we collectively support this vision, there is no excuse why we can't fund it.

Finally, with regard to NASA's current mission and allocation of resources, I believe that space exploration and the research and development of new aeronautics technologies needs to be given greater commitments within the NASA budget. Each year, NASA is funding tremendous amounts of earth science and life science research. While these endeavors have merit, we are now facing a five year gap in U.S. human spaceflight, and we risk losing our place as a world leader in space. NASA's resource allocation has failed to ensure our position in space, and there needs to be a serious reconsideration of current budget allocation within the Administration.

Our country has a proud tradition in space exploration, and I applaud the work of all the men and women who have dedicated their lives to NASA's mission. It is my hope that this commission will recommend a stronger commitment to human space exploration, and I hope President Obama and other members of Congress will heed the commission's advice.

The state of Florida strongly supports NASA and we all stand ready to support NASA's leadership into the future. I thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony before this important Commission.