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August 6, 2009

Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee
NASA Headquarters
300 E St SW
Washington DC 20024-3210

To the committee:

My name is Matt Wronkiewicz. I am a computer programmer with little involvement in the space industry, but I am excited about both the possibility of visiting outer space some day and the potential benefits from its economic development. I was first introduced to the idea that we could extract the resources of space for our benefit by Dr. John Lewis of Arizona University. He argued that not only are the asteroids an extremely valuable resource in the Solar System, they are also easier to reach than the surfaces of the terrestrial planets. It is for those reasons that I find the Exploration Beyond LEO Subcommittee's Deep Space option particularly compelling. Out of all the options presented, this one has the best chance of providing an economic incentive to expand our civilization out into the Solar System. As committee member Dr. Christopher Chyba remarked, "if that is not the point of human space flight, then what the hell are we doing?"

Considering the amount of money invested in NASA to date, I am surprised by how little progress has been made in opening up this frontier. If the Space Shuttle is retired and the ISS de-orbited in the next five years, we will be left with essentially no foothold in space. Due to decades of short-sighted decision making and an inefficient and inflexible NASA workforce, our massive investment in human spaceflight has been squandered. Multiple attempts by NASA to move beyond the Shuttle have ended in failure. It is now too late to finish a new transportation system before the current one is retired. NASA suffers from credibility as well as technical challenges, and these combined will form an insurmountable barrier to sending humans beyond LEO. We have an alternative to repeating the same mistakes again. We can turn transportation to LEO over to the private sector. Only when transportation is directed by economics and not politics will our space efforts be sustainable. Once these capabilities are proven, NASA's mission will even become affordable.

When humans do leave Earth orbit again, their first priority should be to leave something behind to make the next mission easier. The committee has detailed several ways we could accomplish this, such as building outposts, cycling habitats, and propellant depots. Of these, the most achievable given current technology is the propellant depot. Depots in Earth orbit and beyond will not only reduce the cost of NASA missions, they will enable our economy to expand into the Solar System through trade and ISRU. As our economy expands, civilization will follow as a matter of course. For these reasons, propellant depots should not only be an enabler or enhancer for deep space missions, they should be a goal.

Thank you for accepting my comments. I am truly excited and encouraged by the work the committee has done to date.

Sincerely,

Matthew J. Wronkiewicz

This letter may be used publicly.