

The Hon. Frank R. Wolf
Statement on the FY11 NASA Budget Proposal
February 24, 2010

Last October, the Augustine Commission issued its report entitled, “Seeking a Human Spaceflight Program Worthy of a Great Nation.” The proposal this administration has submitted for NASA to abandon the Constellation vision and strategy leaves a program worthy of a lesser nation than the United States.

You are proposing the most radical change to NASA’s mission and programs since its inception and yet the president has been silent since the release of the budget.

You may recall that in August 2008, then-Candidate Obama told an audience of 1,300 in Florida: “Here's what I'm committing to: Continue Constellation.”

This is a notable reversal from the president that will have devastating consequences for decades to come.

Based on the little information that has been provided to the Congress, it appears that this plan was hastily developed without proper vetting from NASA's scientific, engineering, and human spaceflight experts.

Over the last week, I have heard from a number of Apollo astronauts and NASA leaders. I would like to share with you just a few of their initial reactions and submit their full statements for the record:

Former NASA Administrator, Dr. Mike Griffin, wrote, “I believe that this budget request advocates a strategy that is, frankly, disastrous for the U.S. human spaceflight program.” He added that this proposal clears the way for Chinese dominance in space.

Dr. Chris Kraft, the legendary Apollo flight director and former Johnson Space Center director, said “The U.S. Space Program is in great peril if the President's budget proposals are enacted.”

Apollo 7 astronaut Walter Cunningham wrote that this budget proposal, “Accelerates America’s downward spiral toward mediocrity in space exploration.”

Apollo 17 astronaut and former U.S. Senator Harrison Schmitt wrote that this proposal, “would cede the Moon to China, the American Space Station to Russia, and assign liberty to the ages. Other [nations] would accrue the benefits – psychological, political, economic, and scientific – that the United States harvested as a consequence of Apollo’s success 40 years ago. This lesson has not been lost on our ideological and economic competitors.”

Apollo 16 astronaut Charlie Duke said: “We cannot afford to lose our leadership in space. The Constellation program must be continued.”

And perhaps most notably, I received a letter from Burt Rutan, the Ansari X Prize winner who flew the first private commercial craft into space in 2004, who ardently opposes this budget proposal.

Mr Rutan said, “An observer might think that I would applaud a decision to turn this important responsibility over to commercial developers. However, he would be wrong. Two years after Neil and Buzz landed on the moon, America led the world in awarding PhDs in science/engineering/math. Today we are not even on the first or second page...The motivation of our youth is the most important thing we do for our nation's long-term security and prosperity. NASA's role in that can be as critical as it was in the 60s if the taxpayers fund true Research and Exploration.”

Manned spaceflight and exploration is one of the last remaining fields in which the U.S. maintains an undeniable competitive advantage over other nations. To walk away is shortsighted and irresponsible.

By killing the exploration program in favor of a vaguely defined “research and development” program, you are guaranteeing that the Chinese, Russians, and others will be closing the exploration gap.

We will be dependent on the Russians in the short-term for rides to the International Space Station and -- worse -- we will be forced to play catch-up to the Chinese and Russians in the future.

When that time comes, I fear the U.S. will no longer have the resources or the political support to relaunch our human spaceflight program.

James Lewis, with the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said that he sees this decision “as a confirmation of America’s decline.”

In the interim, our spaceflight and manufacturing base will wither and we will be forced to spend far more to recreate our current capacities at a later date.

The editors of *Space News* argued similarly that this could have devastating effect on the U.S. propulsion industrial base –

endangering DOD launch options. This has very real national security implications.

Alternative commercial vehicles will not be available much, if at all, sooner than the Ares I rocket. Worse, these alternative contractors have no experience in manned spaceflight and the safety measures necessary.

As Norm Augustine noted in his report, “Space operations are among the most demanding and unforgiving pursuits ever undertaken by humans.”

NASA's workforce has 40 years experience, having learned by tragedy and success. The Constellation program contractors have been working on these issues for nearly 7 years.

As a result of your plan, at the end of this decade, we will have only a few years of flights to the ISS followed by a fleet of low-Earth orbit vehicles with nowhere to go.

Worse, you will have no exploration vehicle system to go beyond the station.

Above all, your budget proposal leaves NASA with no clear exploration mission goal. An agency with no vision or leadership will slowly decay. It will no longer be a place for our nation's best and brightest to work.

What we need is a NASA with the vision, expertise, and support to maintain and grow our competitive advantage in space exploration.