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The Hon. Frank R. Wolf (VA-10)

Tom,

I occasionally banter with my friend, Mike Griffin on subjects that include golf, the AGW scare and NASA policy. After sending him my latest tirade, he shared with me his recent letter to you regarding taxpayer-funded space research. I promised him that I would send you my thoughts on the debate, which follow:

From my past comments on NASA's post-mid-70s manned space efficiencies/accomplishments, an observer might think that I would applaud a decision to turn this important responsibility over to commercial developers. However, he would be wrong.

No question, it would be good to see commercial companies quickly succeed at orbital access and to take that capability beyond low earth orbit. However, I am fearful that the commercial guys will fail; i.e. they will do little more in my remaining lifetime than NASA accomplished in 3.5 years with Gemini in the mid 1960s. That would be a very big mistake for America to make, as we move into an era of real competition in space exploration as well as risk the loss of our leadership in nearly every other technical discipline.

Mike Griffin's excellent statement says it best; "I too want, in the strongest possible terms, to have government policies which serve to stimulate private development of space. But at the same time, I too am reluctant -- with an analogy to instrument flying -- to give up an airport where I know I can get in on the approach, for one where I might".

What I would like to see is a decade or two of overlap - an initial push in the commercial arena of manned spaceflight (Development programs, not Research programs), while NASA flies risky new ideas (read, true Research programs, giving at least a chance of discovering an important new Breakthrough), and at the same time pushes the forefront of Exploration beyond the earth's moon.

Imagine how much better America could motivate our youth if we were spending the billions of Stimulus Package money on making real progress in our efforts to someday colonize off the planet.

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 and most of our University's technical graduates take their skills back to their own countries to compete with us. 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.

The attachment is a photo I took at the Shuttle STS-130 launch -
Caption: "Reaction when told about the President's NASA directive to abandon manned spaceflight".

As always, I am ok with the distribution of my thoughts without limitation.

While I usually offer candid remarks at the drop of the hat, I am not interested in Congressional testimony, since under duress I occasionally have been known to blurt out the truth. I have no interest in being in the same room with John Holdren..... Taking a line from a very old play: "I must turn away, lest I soil my hands with the blood of a fool"

Burt Rutan