

## **Will the Moon Excitement Dissipate?**

With all the hoopla in the press and the popular media about the first manned moon landing fifty years ago, the question is whether the trip to the moon was worth it and should we continue with manned exploration? Even before the first man landed on the moon there were questions being raised as to whether social issues and solving international problems were more important than spending billions of dollars to put a man on the moon. Many in the public raised the same questions concerning the Space Shuttle, a winged spacecraft that could land on the desert floor like an airplane. Yet, the public followed those flights and collectively mourned the Challenger disaster.

Today, we have created so many billionaires in society that manned flight, trips to the moon and thoughts about a voyage to Mars may be left to the private sector. After all, Columbus was just like Elon Musk. He had a bunch of sponsors and a rich King and Queen who underwrote his voyage to discover a new passage to India.

Manned exploration should continue and the government should be part of the financial underwriting necessary to make the program safe, expeditious and scientifically useful. Sending red Tesla cars into space may help to suck more investors into an enterprise that has never made a dime, but it is not exciting science.

The benefits of space exploration, whether it be in energy, scientific development, or simply helping young people to dream is not something the greatest power on earth should turn its back on. It is difficult to measure the benefit of manned exploration in a society where everyone asks, "What's the bottom line?" The bottom line may not be shown on accounting statements, but it is shown in the number of women, men and minorities who want to learn engineering and to go on to develop new products and strategies for a better world.

When my Uncle Phil returned from World War II, an Army Air Force pilot, he went to work for the government in a capacity that we still do not know about. The family received postcards from all over the world simply saying "Hi, Love Phil." Thereafter, Phil completed his engineering degree at Carnegie Mellon and moved on to the Space Program. My childhood was filled with stories from Uncle Phil about his work on the Polaris missile capable of being launched from a submarine, the Lockheed F104 Star Fighter, the Agena B Rocket which could be restarted in space, as well as all kinds of other technological advances. In addition to being a great engineer, Phil was also a great storyteller.

It was men and women like my Uncle Phil who brought this country to renewed greatness and helped to inspire several generations of young people to study science and reach for the stars. There are those who will say that the government cannot do anything efficiently and that landing a man on the moon only had to do with competition with the Russians. There certainly is a germ of truth to those criticisms. It is also correct that international priorities, not to mention the international community, have done much to promote war and little to encourage peaceful development. The fact that

taxpayer money could be used for solving world problems rather than the exploration of space, does not mean that it will be used for other purposes.

Space exploration is an investment in the future, is inspirational to the next generation and has produced untold advances in the peaceful use of science. The new technologies that will propel interstellar space travel at higher rates of speed like fusion power, will also provide limitless clean energy to mankind. While the arguments for money better spent are serious and should not be ignored, there are lots of other ways to save money. Our tax system subsidizes so many individuals, enterprises and government entities that it is more of a welfare program than a taxation system. A tax system without deductions or exemptions, but with suitably low rates, would eliminate unnecessary subsidies and tax credits, thus providing ample funds for scientific and research developments.

The nation that innovates will produce more than a rich economy. The result of scientific development is a population motivated to achieve and improve. It is time the United States stops paying the Russians to put our citizens into space. We should be spending our money right here in the United States to develop and promote a free independent space program in partnership with our private partners.

The future is only won by those nations and societies who respect the past, honor the present and reach for the future. The United States was at one time best known for Benjamin Franklin who in 1756 was admitted to the Royal Society of Scientists in England. Most school children best know Franklin for sending a kite up during an electrical storm and having a key jingle at the end held by Franklin. To the world, Benjamin Franklin was known as a respected and serious scientist who helped to put the young nation on the map of productive civilizations. We have had many Benjamin Franklins in the intervening years and we need to assure that we will have many more in the future. Enlightenment thinking clearly understands the relationship between science and a free nation.

During the Space Program, the United States worked hard to cleanse the record of its leading rocket scientists like Wernher Von Braun. Von Braun was a Nazi who worked for Germany in its effort to rain terror on England with the use of V2 rockets. Von Braun was a genius who made the fortunate decision to give himself up to the United States instead of Russia. While Eisenhower and Kennedy were somewhat embarrassed by the reliance of the United States on their former enemy, this nation could not have landed on the moon without utilizing the intellect of friends and enemies alike.

The future belongs to those nations which are smart enough to recognize the benefit in overcoming future challenges. We need to do more in this country than put on entertaining public political spectacles. We need to get serious about the business of good governance and a productive relationship between government and business.

The Space Program is essential to our future as a great nation and hopefully it will enjoy public support in the coming years.

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