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Too Many Questions Remain

◀ U.S. REP. PETE OLSON ▶

Five months ago, the administration of U.S. President Barack Obama released NASA's budget proposal for 2011. The plan included the surprisingly drastic decision to cancel NASA's follow-on to the space shuttle program, the Constellation program. Constellation would provide the means to service and utilize the international space station and escape low Earth orbit to begin exploring again. I believed at the time that such a dramatic reversal risked ceding American leadership in human spaceflight for the foreseeable future.

A lot has transpired in the subsequent five months, but I still believe cancelling Constellation presents more risks than rewards, creates more challenges than solutions, and raises more questions than answers.

The fact that NASA and the administration cannot, or will not, provide cogent and comprehensive details related to such a radical policy change should alarm every member of Congress. My colleagues and I remain concerned about our ability to maintain and utilize the international space station, the impact on the aerospace industrial base and highly skilled work force, and the financial, programmatic and crew safety risk of reliance on unidentified commercial crew vehicles. These concerns have not been adequately addressed by the agency or the administration.

I have long supported a balanced program that combines Constellation with an increasing role for the commercial sector,

beginning with cargo flights to the station, and over time, including crewed missions. I will continue to do so. And I am not alone in advocating this balanced approach. As heralded as the Augustine Committee report was when it was released and has become over time within the aerospace community, even it did not propose cancelling Constellation. I still believe that this balance between government and commercial space can exist, and within the budget proposed. Both of these

NASA proposes spending \$1.9 billion to cancel Constellation contracts. Even now, NASA's selective enforcement of a termination liability provision for Constellation contracts is prematurely triggering layoffs across the country. It has been estimated that as many as 20,000 to 30,000 jobs could be lost nationwide as a result.

We aren't just losing jobs. We are losing American know-how. We are losing capabilities and expertise that will be difficult and costly to get back if and when our na-

tion." Our nation's best and brightest engineers and technicians don't want or need an interagency task force. They would much rather retain and put to use their critical skills building and flying American-built spacecraft. The administration claims to be focused on "jobs, jobs, jobs;" yet fails to recognize the destructive impact of cancelling Constellation and shifting \$100 million to the Labor and Commerce departments.

So as we look forward to the next critical six months, there are some things we must do. We must get answers from the administration; we in Congress must recognize the impact on our work force and infrastructure; we must pass an authorization bill; and perhaps most important, we must ensure that the final flights of the shuttle and the continuous operation of the space station are done safely and successfully.

I am both humbled and inspired that while the men and women of our human spaceflight programs watch us debate and question whether their jobs will exist, they continue to excel and drive our nation toward new achievements in space. Their focus, their sacrifice, their dedication, and that of the men and women who came before them, have enabled the United States to be the global leader in human spaceflight. Let us work together to keep it that way.

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sectors have experienced tremendous successes over the past five months — notably the Orion Pad Abort Test in May and the Falcon 9 launch in June.

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tion decides it wants to explore again. Our space program does not employ people, it invests in them. And by so doing, we strengthen our nation's security and economic well-being.

As if to add insult to injury, on June 18 the administration came forward with a request to transfer \$100 million of NASA's already limited resources to the Labor and Commerce departments to fund an interagency task force to spur "regional economic growth and job cre-

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