

THE HILL

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NASA's Future (Rep. Pete Olson)

By Rep. Pete Olson (R-Texas)

Last week, the Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee released the options they have provided to the Administration regarding the future of our nation's human space flight program.

Their opening sentence says it all: "The U.S. human spaceflight program appears to be on an unsustainable trajectory."

Two prior Congresses, and two presidential Administrations, have endorsed the course NASA is on - but failed to provide the necessary funds to accomplish the mission they have been tasked with. Over the years of its existence, NASA has always managed to exceed expectations but the agency is being starved without the necessary funding.

This Congress needs to meet the commitment to our nation's space agency. The work being done benefits science, education, and our economy. Many have argued that the landscape for increasing funding for NASA and related programs is bleak. That we are operating in an environment where programs will be cut and level funding for NASA is unlikely. It is up to us to make the case that investing in NASA is an investment in our economy.

The Johnson Space Center employs more than 18,000 Americans in good high paying jobs. Nationwide that number climbs to over 250,000 jobs. A substantial federal investment in space and NASA could exponentially increase both of those numbers, creating jobs and stimulating our economy.

Many are unaware that NASA investments have resulted in many technologies that have brought billions in revenue into the federal treasury. The total revenue for space products and services in 2008 is estimated to be \$91 billion. Much of that is derived from satellite technologies like GPS. The point is that with science research the payoff cannot be quantified in advance - but they are the natural result of this kind of investment - more than paying for the taxpayer costs.

We have spent billions this year alone trying to bail out the past. It is time that we invest in our future. The so-called stimulus bill was a bloated \$787 billion spending package that has failed to create jobs or stimulate the economy. When the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

(ARRA) bill was passed the Obama administration predicted that unemployment would peak at 8 percent before beginning to subside this fall. But unemployment has already reached 9.7 percent and the situation is not projected to improve until long after the White House predicted.

Last Friday, NASA concluded another successful shuttle mission to the International space station with the landing of STS-128 Discovery in California. The achievements of the men and women of America's space program cannot continue to be received with empty promises and constant second guessing.

It is my job as a Member of Congress to make the case for this kind of investment at the federal level and I am committed to do my part. But this type of effort also requires the space community making their case to the public as well. We must work together to ensure that the NASA of today is present tomorrow.

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