



U.S. getting back to a viable, productive, successful space program

By Congressman Mike Coffman

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Our nation's space program has been on a confusing ride this year. But it appears that we are back on track to a promising future.

In February, the Obama administration made a budget request that would end NASA's current program for astronauts to further explore our solar system by returning to the moon and then beyond. Under the president's proposal, NASA would have instead developed new technologies for several years before beginning a program to reach more distant destinations in 15 years or so. NASA would also contract out its current rocket needs, paying private companies and the Russian government (at \$52 million a seat) for cargo and astronaut access to the International Space Station.

This affected Colorado in several ways. The Orion crew capsule for the Constellation program which Obama proposed cancelling is being built by Lockheed Martin here in Littleton. But Colorado is rich with aerospace firms, and some of those could see increased business from both the new NASA grants for technology development and space station contracting.

Then, in April, President Obama said he wanted to retain the Orion crew capsule after all, but as a reduced "lifeboat" for the space station.

However, there was opposition from both sides of the aisle on Capitol Hill to the president's plans. I believed the proposed reduction in our space ambitions was poorly timed and would have had negative results. Many foreign governments are boosting spending and increasing overall efforts in space. They recognize that a significant part of the United States' technological superiority and military preeminence can be traced to our investment in and

utilization of space assets. A key member of the House committee that will ultimately determine NASA's funding, Rep. Frank Wolf of Virginia, has said that if Congress allows NASA manned exploration programs "to continue to drift," the result will be "increased costs and lost capabilities."

The new proposals were not money saving – the NASA budget request was, in keeping with the Obama administration's practices, increased. The proposed changes to NASA's goals by the administration were not just a new version of our previous plans, but a deliberate attempt to downgrade our space capabilities.

NASA Administrator Charles Bolden gave an interview to Al Jazeera last month where he said President Obama told him before he took the job that he wanted him to do three things: "perhaps foremost, he wanted me to find a way to reach out to the Muslim world and engage much more with dominantly Muslim nations to help them feel good about their historic contribution to science ... and math and engineering."

NASA later backed off the claim that such international diplomacy is Bolden's "foremost" responsibility. The White House also denied the assertion. But Bolden also said the United States is not going to travel beyond low-Earth orbit on its own and that no country is going to make it to Mars without international help. Since the U.S. was able to leave low earth orbit on its own 40 years ago, this smacks of a retreat from leadership, and indicative of a reduction in motivation and aspiration in an endeavor that has provided countless actual and tangible benefits to the American nation.

I believe we can do better. I worked closely with my colleagues to ensure that the United States maintains a viable, productive and successful space program, which is thoroughly partnered with the private sector. I am pleased that we appear to be returning to this direction.

The House and Senate science committees have prepared bipartisan bills that would reject President Obama's proposed changes. And though a separate committee approved the full \$19 billion NASA budget requested by the White House, it put a hold on \$3.5 billion earmarked for manned space exploration until the science committees pass their legislation.

The science committees' bills will add at least one more space shuttle flight, hurry progress on a

new heavy-lift rocket (capable of carrying humans and their required equipment) and continue building the spacecraft to venture beyond the limitations of the shuttle, which is low-Earth orbit. They would also require that private sector companies demonstrate their capabilities before receiving contracts for taking astronauts to the space station.

As we head into the August district work period I will continue to keep the words of the more than 500 Coloradans who wrote thanking me for my commitment to and support of the Orion program. We must also remember a retreat from leadership in space exploration is detrimental to our community's economy and detrimental to our nation.