

Mr. Chairman - thanks for inviting me - it is a pleasure. I am a freelance journalist with about 18 years experience covering the US space program - most of that time with my former employer - a large cable news network. Since I moved on, I have been covering space on the web - in partnership with spaceflightnow.com. We offer continuous live interactive coverage of shuttle launches - and draw a large global audience - in the past few month we have been producing a weekly half hour program to the web called this week in space - which has become the definitive video chronicler of the events that bring us here today.

I also need to tell you I serve as Chairman of the Education and Public Outreach Committee of the NASA Advisory Council - but to be clear - my views expressed here today are my own.

Mr. Chairman, I am a child of the Space Race and I consider myself pretty darn lucky to be able to say that. I, like most of you in this room, bore witness to a stunning moment in history - a towering accomplishment that defied the odds that made us feel good about what humanity can accomplish collectively when we combine big goals with hard work, ingenuity and bold action.

It is a lesson that my generation took to the bank. We (well not me) - but we collectively embraced the disciplines we now call STEM - science, technology engineering and mathematics. This planted the seeds of success in Silicon Valley - and insured US economic dominance for many decades.

I sure wish my teenage son and daughter had been as lucky as I. They have no first hand experience with those amazing exciting days. And so, even in my household, where my interest and passion in the subject is well understood - perhaps tolerated is a better term - there is little evidence NASA is connecting well with the children of the post space race generation.

And truth be told, NASA lost many members of my generation over the past thirty years. How many people even know when a space shuttle is in on the launch pad? Or that US astronauts in orbit continuously on a space station for nearly a decade now? Or that we have a space station at all. A shocking number of otherwise smart people don't have a clue.

Many of those same people did not know the shuttle program was near its end - and that, until recently, the plan was to return to the Moon in a suite of rockets and vehicles collectively called "Constellation". When they asked me for more about this, I would frequently quote former NASA Administrator Mike Griffin - who called it "Apollo on steroids". This was my (lame) attempt at making it as interesting - as say - professional sports or something.

The truth is the public in general long ago stopped paying much attention to what NASA is doing in the manned space realm. There have been some spikes of interest here and there - for Hubble repair missions, to see John Glenn fly or, sadly, for the returns to

flight after the accidents - but in general - it's been a long, steady decline that really began on July 24th, 1969 - when Columbia capsule carrying Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins splashed down in the Pacific. Let's not forget Apollo was never built to be a sustainable program. It was all about the sprint. Is it any surprise it did not sustain public interest?

Washington, we have a problem...

Now a natural reaction for those of us who lived through the triumph of Apollo is to harken back to the good old days. Bring back those "One small step...Failure it is not an option" moments and surely our kids will get space bug - and thus we hope - they will be stirred toward STEM as well....Hey - it worked like a charm then? Why not do it again for old time's sake...

There are a lot of good reasons the recipe for Apollo moment cannot be replicated: there's the Cold War context, the desire meet a seemingly unattainable goal set by a martyred president and, of course, there was the NASA budget that would equate to more than 30 billion dollars this year. Now that's some launching around money!

None of those elements are in the cards today. And let's not forget we have been there, done that - and those footprints are forever etched in the regolith. While the mission planners and engineers will point out the proposal to build a more permanent moon base is an entirely different - and new - challenge, I am afraid this detail is lost on a jaded public that wants to hear about something entirely new and different.

So what do people care about when it comes to space? So what are the stories that leak out from under my little tent of space lovers? Well - speaking of leaks - a new image from the Cassini spacecraft which rolled out yesterday is a great example. it shows huge water plumes spurting out from the surface of Saturn's moon Enceladus. Very cool stuff. Stories about extrasolar planets get a lot of pickup...so do interesting images from the spacecraft that orbit and rove Mars...anything from Hubble - or anything about the former planet Pluto.

And when it comes to human beings in space - there is insatiable interest in the effort to open space up to the rest of us. I will never forget the thrill I had covering SpaceShipOne as it captured the X-Prize in Mojave in October of 2004. The excitement in the air was palpable - for a flight that went about as high as Alan Shepard went in May of 1961.

But this time it was one of us. The candle was lit beneath a rank civilian. No Right Stuff required. Suddenly, it all seemed within our grasp - in our lifetimes. Nearly fifty years after Gagarin and Shepard flew - only 500 humans have made it to space - you Mr. Chairman are one the of the lucky ones. I had hoped to be on the list by now myself.

People want to go there themselves - simply sending a GS-13 civil servant does not thrill them anymore.

It is high time the government helped open up the space frontier to the private sector - just as it helped the railroads span the continent...or as it built the interstates...or created our aviation infrastructure. And I applaud the White House for placing this bet on what amounts to nascent spacelines that may one day carry hundreds of people to space every month...or every week. Arthur C. Clarke would be proud. An while this exciting aspect of the plan got lost in badly bungled public rollout of the news - I think it will generate a lot of excitement as time goes on.

I applaud extra money spent on aeronautics and earth sciences. Theses efforts will go a long way in helping the agency answer those every day relevancy questions that always come up. These will be good stories to tell the public.

I applaud the money that will be spent on participatory exploration. The public that wants to go to space - also demands to be looking over the shoulders of NASA scientists as they download the latest Hubble, Cassini or Opportunity images.

And I am glad the station won't be deep-sixed before it even has a chance to prove its scientific value. It turns out the absence of gravity can make germs more virulent. By turning up the volume on This might make it easier to learn how to make vaccines. There might be some real news that comes out of this unique national laboratory in the next decade.

Which bring us to the mission. What is the next great human mission in space? Frankly it isn't clear. And that is a big worrisome. It is nice to have goals. We children of the Space Race love a destination and a deadline. But goals that simply lead to uninspired jobs programs are not what we need.

NASA was not getting anywhere doing business the way it had been. Over the years, the money required to keep flying the shuttle safely left little room to push the envelope - as they say. With this budget, the money will be there to pursue some new propulsion technologies that might get us to Mars in a reasonable period of time; or find some better ways to arrive in orbit and on the surface of another planet; or work on closed loop life support systems; or come up with ways for future explorers to use the resources that exist on Mars.

In one sense, we won't going anywhere I suppose. But we will be exploring - taking the necessary first steps on the journey we have dreamed of for years. I only wish we had started sooner.

It is time for our space agency to reboot and rethink its mission. I look forward to telling the story of NASA 2.0.

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