

CAGW: Moon, Mars Missions Not A Priority For Taxpayers

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WASHINGTON, June 16 (SPX) -- Citizens Against Government Waste (CAGW) today criticized plans to move forward with missions to the moon and Mars with an impending record deficit, chronic management problems at NASA, and unresolved questions about the missions' cost and feasibility.

NASA's new administrator Michael Griffin has said that the space agency will have the money to implement President Bush's "Vision for Space Exploration," aimed at returning humans to the moon by 2020 and eventually sending them to Mars.

"A manned mission to Mars is of questionable scientific value and could cost up to \$1 trillion," CAGW President Tom Schatz said. "The immense technological challenges involved are expected to be overcome by an agency that currently lacks the ability to launch a shuttle beyond low-earth orbit."

The Columbia Accident Investigation Board described in stinging detail the long-term and widespread failures of NASA's entire management that caused the Columbia and Challenger disasters and the problems that continue to plague the manned- spaceflight program.

Institutional arrogance precludes managers from dealing honestly with internal problems or outside criticism. Management routinely "deferred to layered and cumbersome regulations rather than the fundamentals of safety."

Also, a recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) faulted NASA for not adequately exploring alternatives to the space shuttle.

NASA has been unable to complete an audit of the agency's budget for the past five years and its accounting is labeled "high risk" by the Bush Administration. A 2004 GAO report revealed that NASA had lost \$34 million in government property since 1997 and has failed to keep track of items including a \$300,000 robot.

The President's initiative was left for dead in the summer of 2004 after a lukewarm reception from the public and deep skepticism from prominent scientists. But funding for the initiative was included at the last minute in the fiscal 2005 omnibus bill.

For fiscal 2006, House appropriators have marked up NASA's budget at \$16.5 billion - including \$3.1 billion for the moon/Mars initiative - which is \$275 million above fiscal 2005 levels and \$15 million above the President's budget request.

Grandiose tales of bases on the moon and trips to Mars are reminiscent of the International Space Station (ISS), which was once envisaged as a beehive of research, a stopover service station for space travelers, and an assembly and manufacturing plant.

The ISS is expected to be finished in 2010 - 16 years behind schedule, \$92 billion over budget, with perhaps one-eighth of the capability that engineers had hoped. NASA expects to abandon the ISS after only seven years of full operation.

The ISS is a glaring link in a continuous chain of space projects that are either abandoned, end in disaster, or deliver far less than promised. NASA's unbroken string of six cancelled vehicle programs stretches

back to the Reagan Administration, and the \$125 million Mars orbiter was lost to improper conversion between metric and English units.

"Mankind's future in space no longer depends on politicized bureaucracies and tax-funded boondoggles," Schatz concluded.

"The success of SpaceShipOne, startup space companies, and the advent of space tourism have opened the door to an exciting future of private enterprise in space. Such endeavors are economical, realistic, and more likely to yield tangible benefits for mankind and taxpayers."

Citizens Against Government Waste is the nation's largest nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in government.

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