

# Scuttle The Shuttle Says Space Frontier Foundation

July 14 2005

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In anticipation of this week's planned return to flight of NASA's Space Shuttle Discovery, the Space Frontier Foundation renewed its call for the orbiters to be retired.

The Foundation, which for over 15 years has criticized the Shuttle system as too costly, urged NASA and Congress to announce a firm date when the last Shuttle orbiter will fly.

"If it were up to us, the Shuttle never would have flown in the first place," remarked the Foundation's Rick Tumlinson. "Far from opening space to the American people, it weighed down our space program with its bloated budgets, massive support network and tragic cost in terms of human life. Its' time has passed. We should kill that program as soon possible, before more money gets wasted."

The Foundation understands that the space agency is trapped by its need to complete assembly of the International Space Station with partners in Europe, Russia, Japan, and Canada, and this means flying the Shuttles perhaps a dozen or more times. (Many station components were designed to fly on the Shuttle alone.)

But the citizens' group wants NASA to name a date when the last orbiter will fly so that a transition can be planned to other methods of reaching orbit, preferably based on private sector firms, flying people and payloads as part of a new free-enterprise space transportation marketplace.

Explained Tumlinson, "the U.S. government got itself into a huge mess with the space station and Shuttle system, and now it is digging its way out. But those who are insisting the orbiters keep flying right up until new systems are in place will in fact be burying our hopes of advancing to anything new - no matter what those are.

"Pouring billions into the Space Shuttles rips off the taxpayers - and betrays NASA's hardworking employees - by feeding a dying beast, while simultaneously starving a newborn industry and NASA's future exploration efforts."

The Foundation points out that a fraction of the money going into the current system would launch a whole new space transportation marketplace, that could serve both the government and new space industries.

There are private firms who could take over the job now being done by the orbiters, if some certainty can be created for timing and type of hand-off. They also endorse recent moves by new NASA administrator Mike Griffin to use commercial-type contracting methods to buy delivery services for ISS re-supply, and explore innovative partnerships to enable lower-cost human access to ISS or commercial space stations.

"The space station can be re-supplied by commercial firms, and given the proper encouragement and new ways of contracting, they will also be able to carry crews to and from the facility," continued Tumlinson.

"It's going to take a few years to get these new systems and companies off the ground, but we have to set the deadline now, so money can be raised, business plans funded, and rocket ships flown. Frankly, even NASA's own workforce needs to be able to plan for a firm deadline, so they can transition to new projects at NASA, or to these new commercial companies."

Tumlinson concluded, "the bottom line is that we agree with the courageous new leaders at NASA: when it comes to flying people or cargo into space on the outdated, costly, and risky Shuttle system - let it end by 2010 - or even sooner."

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