

## 47. SPACE POLICY AND THE CONSTITUTION #5

Harrison H. Schmitt  
July 20, 2011

For Immediate Release

### **Former Senator Schmitt Reflects on America's Space Program: Past, Present and Future\***

The 42nd Anniversary of humankind's first lunar landing by Apollo 11 on July 20, 2011, followed by the return of STS-135 on the next day, concluding the final flight of a United States Space Shuttle, places a capstone on the remarkable accomplishments of the post-Apollo generations of space engineers, builders and operators.

Those of us who were in attendance at the launch of *Atlantis* on July 8, 2011, felt both pride in this final accomplishment and sadness at another unnecessary, ill-conceived and excessively prolonged break in America's commitment to lead humankind in space. Pad 39A, the Vehicle Assembly Building, and the Crawler Transporter stand in the Florida sunshine as still functional but unwanted relics of past glories. Unfortunately, these momentous events also starkly frame the deficiencies in American space policy relative to long-term national interests. This policy began its slow decline in 1968-69 when the Johnson and Nixon Administrations began the process to end procurements of the Saturn V boosters and spacecraft advocated by Eisenhower and Kennedy for the Apollo Moon-landing Program.

The absence of any significant national goals epitomizes current space policy. That

policy lacks any coherent strategy to lead humankind in space and promote liberty there and on Earth. Failure of all Administrations and Congresses since Eisenhower and Kennedy to maintain a sustainable, indefinite commitment to human deep space exploration and settlement has undermined America's status in the world and the technological foundations necessary for national security and economic growth. We have reached a point where America and its partners depend on Russia for future access to the International Space Station. More critically, we will be ceding the Moon and deep space to China. This should be an intolerable situation to American taxpayers who paid for most of the Space Station and whose Astronauts blazed the trail for humankind to the Moon.

President George W. Bush provided the Nation with a space policy in 2004 that met critical geopolitical requirements. If it had been properly funded by Congress, Bush's policy would have created a replacement for the Space Shuttle by 2010 and, more importantly, provided for a return to the Moon on the way to Mars. Mr. Bush, however, did not ask Congress for the funds necessary to fully implement his Constellation Program. Constellation nonetheless could have been executed fully when President Barack Obama

took office in 2009, although with a several year delay in the availability of the Shuttle replacement spacecraft (Orion).

President Obama, however, soon canceled Constellation, reflecting his personal bias against American exceptionalism and anything identified with Bush. His visions of largely unsupervised private contractors providing astronaut transportation to space and an unproductive visit to an asteroid are just that, unproven “visions” but hardly visionary. In light of increases of trillions of dollars in recent federal government spending, the \$3 billion per year cost of implementing a “shovel ready” and “employment ready” Constellation Program appears, relatively, very small. The enormous geopolitical damage to America’s world leadership role that its cancellation has brought about will cost us dearly in the future.

*Atlantis*’s final arrival in Earth-orbit was historically comparable to the arrivals of the last covered wagon at Western destinations just before the Union Pacific, Central Pacific, Santa Fe and other railroads reached rapidly expanding local economies in the late 1800s. Unbelievably, and unlike the replacement of covered wagon technology with railroad technology, no American replacement exists for the Space Shuttle. Now

that Obama has made NASA largely irrelevant in America’s future, the next President and Congress must consider how to reverse this damage to national security and to the future motivation of young Americans.

The next President must seriously consider focusing United States’ space goals on deep space exploration. Until the Space Station must be shut down and deorbited, NASA can continue to be responsible for managing related international obligations. A separate and intense focus on deep space, however, could be accomplished by reassignment of most NASA functions to other agencies and the creation of a new National Space Exploration Agency (NSEA) [see Essay [No. 46](#)]. This would be a proper tribute to the sacrifices made on behalf of America by the personnel of NASA and its contractors since 1958. A clear commitment to deep space would also restore America’s geopolitical will to lead humankind into the future.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Harrison H. Schmitt is a former United States Senator from New Mexico as well as a geologist and Apollo 17 Astronaut. He currently is an aerospace and private enterprise consultant and a member of the new Committee of Correspondence.*

#### Note Cited in Text

\* Essays [No. 7](#), [No. 18](#), [No. 20](#), [No. 25](#), [No. 35](#) have been revised and collected together into a special booklet entitled *Space Policy and the Constitution* with a Foreword written by Michael D. Griffin, NASA Administrator (2005-2009). Essay [No. 46](#) forms the Preface and the present essay forms the Epilogue to that booklet, which is available from the “[Downloads](#)” page of the AUS website.