

Space exploration is a bipartisan imperative that benefits all

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Space exploration and development are and have always been a bipartisan initiative that is vitally important to America. Today, space impacts every facet of 21st century life. Business, governance, security, education, agriculture, manufacturing, health care, communication and many other sectors all rely on space-based infrastructure and technology. These in turn rely on government programs in space exploration and science.

There is strong bipartisan support for the path that NASA is on. The Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, the Orion crewed spacecraft, the James Webb Space Telescope, robotic missions to distant worlds and the continuing human presence on the International Space Station have created an evolving foundation for a new age of science, exploration and commerce.

We explore outward to discover inward. Over the decades, investments in NASA research have unlocked the secrets of the universe and, in the process, have improved life on Earth.

For example, we have conducted missions to every planet in our solar system and examined many of their moons. “Water worlds” such as Europa and Enceladus, Mars with its large salty seas below the surface, and exoplanets, can teach us about water cycles on distant worlds as well as our own. In turn, the knowledge we are acquiring from exploration of these and other planetary bodies give us clues about the future of our own planet as we face the growing crisis of climate change.

Humans in deep space inspire and drive discovery and new knowledge. The systems under development to return Americans to deep space will forge the path back to the Moon and onto Mars. Some of these include the Orion crewed spacecraft, the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, the Exploration Ground Systems that support them and their missions, the Human Landing System(s) and the lunar Gateway. These missions are scheduled to start next year and to progress in rapid fashion thereafter. Together, these programs have sustained thousands of jobs from suppliers in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, supporting economic recovery and the benefits that NASA Exploration brings to addressing planetary concerns and issues here on Earth, including climate change.

Innovation is the hallmark of space exploration. Building upon the value created by government programs, entrepreneurial firms are fully engaged; developing capabilities to land small payloads on the lunar surface while also scaling up to large systems for lunar landing and habitation. These efforts work hand-in-hand with our national programs in exploration and science, advancing technology and increasing the demand for jobs in sustained career paths. Space exploration and development fuel the growth of new industries and a vital STEM workforce that we will need to support U.S. competitiveness and, importantly, to meet key national imperatives in the future — not only to address the challenge of climate change, but also the pressing needs of cleaner energy and water, medical care, national security and to drive our economy forward.

To ensure that the United States continues to prosper and lead in outer space, Congress and the White House must find a way to stay the course and fully fund the nation’s space exploration enterprise in balance with other competing policy priorities. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic create challenges not faced in our lifetimes. Yet, NASA must have budget stability to maintain continuity of major programs and mitigate mission delays. NASA must also have budget stability to capitalize on all of the investments made over previous decades for the benefit of all.

The global space policy environment is rapidly evolving. Maturing global competition in space from other nations carries both potential opportunities for partnership and possible threats to U.S. primacy in space. Returning to the Moon as our next step in human exploration, together with a strong national commitment to science in low Earth orbit and in deep space, offers us the promise of a next great Space Age — a rejuvenation and refocus of the future of space exploration, science and commerce that will become the legacy of a future administration and Congress.

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