

Augustine Panel Finds NASA Budget "Not Friendly" to Human Space Exploration

Written by Administrator

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We [reported](#) previously that the President's panel on human spaceflight, headed by former Lockheed Martin CEO Norm Augustine, concluded that the U.S. "space gap" in manned space flight (the time between the retirement of the current space shuttle and the first launch of the next-generation Constellation program vehicles) would be longer than NASA has admitted. Now comes word from Aviation Week & Space Technology (AW&ST) that the panel has found no "palatable options" within the current NASA budget plan for human space flight. According to AW&ST (as reported in its online Aerospace Daily & Defense Report on August 12, 2009), the Augustine panel heard testimony from former Astronaut Sally Ride that "NASA's current program of record -- retiring the shuttle and closing down the International Space Station (ISS) by 2016, developing the Ares I/Orion system as a shuttle replacement, and mounting a lunar return by 2020 -- simply doesn't fit" within the Obama Administration's FY2010 budget guidance. The AW&ST article quotes Ms. Ride as saying, "There was not enough money to even start the lunar systems."

Should the Obama Administration provide NASA with another \$2 billion annually, then a return to the moon is possible by 2025, according to Ms. Ride, who chaired a subcommittee that worked with cost analysts at NASA and the Aerospace Corporation. The AW&ST article reported:

"More promising were the so-called 'Deep Space' options, which would defer lunar exploration in the near-term in favor of trips to other locations in the solar system. Within the 'less constrained' [NASA] budget, and using a dual Ares V "lite" heavy-lift approach, astronauts could visit a Lagrange Point by 2025, a near-Earth object (NEO) in 2030, and perform a Mars flyby in 2035, according to Ride. Another 'Deep Space' option would abandon Ares in favor of a large, 75-metric ton capable hydrocarbon-fueled heavy lifter and could allow the deep space sites to be visited a bit earlier, but this change of approach would 'significantly disrupt' NASA, and require facility shutdown and workforce reduction costs of \$3 billion - \$11 billion. Nonetheless, 'Deep Space' appears to be the most cost effective of the exploration scenarios, and it has earlier return also," Ride said ."

Given the historic U.S. leadership in manned space flight, it is disappointing that more is not being done to assist NASA in getting off the ground. If the Obama Administration wants to speed the recovery, it should consider redirecting some of the ARRA funds to NASA and its contractors.