

The Space Program Is Key to Organizing The Best Talents of Our Nation

by Kesha Rogers

We choose to go to the Moon. We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too.

— President John F. Kennedy

Feb. 21—Monday, February 20 marked the 55th Anniversary of the day that the first American orbited the Earth. On February 20, 1962, John Glenn rocketed into space aboard the Project Mercury capsule, Friendship 7. Glenn circled the globe three times in four hours and fifty-six minutes.

Now we reflect on the importance of that day in history, and on John Glenn's contribution to implementing the vision and challenge to the nation put forth by President John F. Kennedy, "to land a man on the Moon and return him safely to Earth" before that decade, the 1960s, was out. His challenge to the nation came only a few weeks after the famous flight of astronaut Alan Shepard, the first American to make a sub-orbital flight into space, a flight of less than 16 minutes on May 5, 1961. These missions were televised. The accomplishments of our nation's space program inspired our entire nation and the world, and inspired a deter-

mination in President Kennedy to commit the nation to the greater mission. We would be first to the Moon, but our mission would not stop there.

The success of John Glenn's flight 55 years ago, and the achievements of other American astronauts and Soviet cosmonauts—such as Yuri Gagarin, the first person to orbit the Earth—proved that there are no limits to what mankind can accomplish, that there is nothing that can hold us back, including the ostensibly budget-driven policies that we are seeing today. And so the nation was determined that Kennedy had laid out a mission and that, despite all odds, it was one we would accomplish. On July 20, 1969, Americans would be the first human beings to set foot on the Moon and "come in peace for all mankind." The goal was only met by doing as President Kennedy would declare, by organizing the best energies and skills of our nation.

That is the outlook and understanding required today, to restore a national mission and once again inspire great optimism in the people of this nation and the world. We need strong determination to continue to reach for new frontiers in the exploration and development of space. We need a vision for the nation, for our young people, not the endless funding of imperial wars and bailing out of Wall Street speculators. As astronaut John Glenn once said,

The most important thing we can do is inspire young minds and to advance the kind of science, math, and technology education that



NASA

At Cape Canaveral, Dr. Wernher von Braun explains the Saturn Launch System to President Kennedy, Nov. 16, 1963.

will help youngsters take us to the next phase of space travel.

Fight Wall Street, Defend the Mind

President Trump has promised to establish a national mission to relaunch our space program. That requires us to unify the nation and the world around the kind of win-win cooperation that has been offered by China. We must commit to working with China and Russia, to continue the mapping of the lunar surface, and to work on constructing stations there: The lunar surface continues to be the gateway to the Solar System, the gateway to Mars.

We must put an end to the hypocrisy, the sabotage, the destructive policies that are coming from the Wall Street apparatus in the U.S. Congress that says we cannot work with China.

We must also stop the sabotage coming from the Wall Street apparatus of former President Barack Obama, who is actually putting in place more policies to create division and destruction in the nation, as he did when, as President, he cancelled the Constellation program for manned spaceflight to the Moon by 2020 and then to Mars. His efforts to set our space program back have continued since his departure from the Presidency.

Even in a Feb. 16 Congressional hearing of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, titled, “NASA: Past Present and Future,” certain members continued to push insane, monetarist ideas that continue to sabotage our nation’s commitment to space exploration. There were questions such as, “How do we stop the increase in the budget of our space program?” “How do you establish responsible stewardship of the American taxpayer’s dollar?” “Don’t we need public/private partnerships to augment taxpayers’ investments?”

Congress should be more concerned about, “How do we stop the continuing wars, costing billions and trillions of dollars, to support terrorism, to defend ISIS?” and “How do we stop the trillion-dollar bailouts on behalf of Wall Street derivatives?” These have to be stopped! There is no excuse whatsoever for taking the future away from our young people. The space program and NASA are key to the scientific and economic progress of the nation. They develop the talents and skills of our nation!

It’s Not the Money, Stupid!

China has lifted more than 700 million people out of the most dire poverty. How did it do that? China’s leadership had a vision for their nation, for their future, for

their young people. They have committed their nation to being the first to land on the far side of the Moon. They are organizing nations around the world to cooperate in establishing a permanent presence on the Moon. The United States must join in such a mission. We must inspire a new generation of young scientists, astronauts, and engineers. During the Feb. 16 Congressional hearing, former astronaut Harrison Schmitt stated that our space program needs a generation of leaders with an average age of 30 or less, because young people are not afraid of risk, they’re not afraid of taking on new challenges and responsibilities.

People are now too concerned about “my money.” We need to be concerned about the future and the development of our people. We must be concerned about inspiring every person in our society to be creative and productive. It was not “the money” that launched our nation to the Moon. It was vision and creativity. Today Margot Shetterly’s book, *Hidden Figures*, and the movie based on it, remind us of that ([see review, p.29](#)).

Some of the greatest, little known pioneers in the space program were engineers and mathematicians behind the scenes, including a very brilliant, creative group of African American women who were “computers,” mathematicians, and engineers. Katherine Johnson was a member of that talented African American group, and John Glenn made sure that *she* checked the calculations of the machine before he would travel into space.

He was not concerned about whether a machine could do the job; he trusted the power of the human mind. If John Glenn had not made that trip, would we have landed on the Moon? Would we have accomplished the goal that President Kennedy set out? Was it the machine or the mind that got us there?

It’s time to rid the nation of our commitment to monetarism. It should never have been allowed to dominate this country. We must go back to the understanding that economic value is based on the creative powers of the human mind. Our space program is the key to advancing the economy of our nation and of the world. Cooperation is key.

Many members of Congress in office today were inspired by the space program under President Kennedy. Now, they sit there and say, “Well, we can’t do it, because we can’t afford it.” That’s insanity, that is sabotage, and it has to be stopped.

We must put our space program, NASA, and cooperation with many nations around the world back at the top of our nation’s agenda.