

FRANK R. WOLF

10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA



233 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5136

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

CHAIRMAN—COMMERCE-JUSTICE-SCIENCE

TRANSPORTATION-HUD

STATE AND FOREIGN OPERATIONS

CO-CHAIR—TOM LANTOS
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

December 19, 2013

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-5800
(800) 945-9653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The President
The White House
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On Saturday, the world watched as the People's Republic of China landed a rover on the surface of the Moon. This marked the first successful "soft" landing on the lunar surface since a Soviet probe in 1976, which followed the last U.S. landing of Apollo 17 in 1972. This is a remarkable achievement for the Chinese space program, which is run by the People's Liberation Army – the same army that 25 year ago this June brutally repressed pro-democracy protestors in Tiananmen Square, spilling the blood of innocent people and unjustly imprisoning untold others – and their repression continues still today. The Cold War may have ended, but the brutality of authoritarian regimes is not a thing of the past.

As China prepares to send a series of increasingly advanced rovers to the Moon in preparation for what most observers believe will ultimately be human missions, many are asking why the U.S. is not using this opportunity to lead our international partners in an American-led return to the Moon.

It is not a matter of capability; NASA is already building a super heavy-lift rocket and a crew exploration spacecraft, akin to the Apollo program's capabilities. Lander technology development work continues at NASA today too. These are the essential elements for a lunar mission and, for the moment, the U.S. is the only nation developing such unique and essential exploration capabilities. What's missing, however, is the vision needed to provide a compelling mission and direction for our human exploration program.

This administration's recalcitrance in leading a lunar mission is creating a crisis of confidence in the U.S. space program, both at home but also among our partners, including Europe, Canada, Japan and Russia. Our allies want to work with NASA on their exploration programs, but our failure to lead compelling lunar-focused exploration missions will almost certainly mean that our partners will turn to others.

One of the great, but too rarely celebrated, successes of the International Space Station program over the last twenty years is that it aligned the resources and energies of our international partners' space programs with the U.S. to create one of the most amazing technological achievements in human history. As these countries consider how to spend their space dollars in the years ahead, they will be deciding whether to remain closely aligned with the U.S. or instead align with other countries, some of whom may not share our values or national security interests. This will have very real diplomatic and security consequences for our country.

Today, however – whether we like it or not – the U.S. finds itself in real competition with another country vying for preeminence in space for the first time since the 1960s. Because of our historic feats in space and the expertise of NASA and U.S. industry, America still has a distinct advantage and a head start should it decide to return to the Moon, but the window is rapidly closing. The decisions made in the next year or two – by your administration – will likely determine whether the U.S. leads the first return to the Moon or if we will sit by and watch others fill the void left by our absence. Not since President Kennedy has a U.S. president faced such a momentous decision of historic significance to U.S. space leadership.

Prior to your administration, there was longstanding bipartisan consensus that the next step in U.S. human space exploration was a return to the Moon to develop and test the technologies necessary for human missions to Mars. This was codified in NASA authorization bills passed by both a Republican Congress in 2005 and by a Democratic Congress in 2008. Most notably, Congress specifically maintained the key elements of a lunar exploration program – the super heavy-lift Space Launch System and the Orion exploration crew spacecraft – in the 2010 NASA Authorization. These systems will provide the U.S. with an exceptional capability and will be the critical national assets used to lead exploration missions for decades to come.

However, other countries are not sitting idly by. China recently announced plans for a super heavy-lift comparable to the U.S. Space Launch System. That is why it is imperative that the U.S. finish development of these systems on schedule and lay out a strategic vision for their use for lunar missions and beyond before others do.

Mr. President, decisions made in the final years of your administration determine whether the international community aligns behind a U.S.-led space exploration program for the next several decades or if they decide to partner with others. The failure to lead a return to the Moon with our allies and even possible non-traditional partners, including new state actors in space as well as private industry, would have ramifications far beyond your presidency.

I have been concerned by this administration's misguided focus on capturing an asteroid to place in lunar orbit for American astronauts to visit. While there may be some merit to developing technologies involved in capturing an asteroid, this is hardly compelling as a human mission and is a multi-billion dollar distraction. Our international partners have expressed little interest or support and, more importantly, it has fallen flat with the American people and NASA's own workforce, according to Dr. Albert Carnesale who led a recent National Research Council commission looking at NASA's strategic direction. Dr. Carnesale told an audience earlier this year that "The more we learn about [the asteroid mission], the more we hear about it, people seem less enthusiastic about it," and "If you ask people in the bowels of NASA, in the field offices—and we spoke with everybody from the directors of each of the field offices to college interns and everybody in between—this is not generally accepted." However, Carnesale also noted that, "There's a great deal of enthusiasm, almost everywhere, for the Moon." Even the celebrated former commander of the International Space Station, Canadian astronaut Chris Hatfield, told a paper just this week that, "The next logical step is to go to the Moon."

However well-intentioned the asteroid mission proposal may be, I urge you to reconsider in light of the strong support for a lunar mission. Congress continues to support such a mission and

there is clearly a hunger from the American people and our international partners for such an effort. Managed properly, a lunar mission could be accomplished within NASA's budget, provided that our partners contribute towards it. Most importantly, you have tremendously capable men and women at NASA and within the contractor community who are poised and ready to accomplish such a mission given the right leadership.

It's time to set aside the proposed asteroid mission and instead focus NASA's direction on leading a return to the Moon, before our partners commit their resources to another country. Great nations are never content with the status quo. America is no exception. Our national narrative is one marked by exploration, whether the Western frontier or the boundless frontier of space.

For these reasons, I am asking you to hold a conference at the White House early in the new year to bring together the best minds from around the country and among our international partners to develop a mission concept for a U.S.-led return to the Moon within the next ten years, using the SLS and Orion systems and identifying areas for our international partners and private industry to contribute. We can use a series of lunar missions of increasing duration during the 2020s to test out the technologies necessary to support your goal of sending a crewed mission to Mars in the 2030s, as you called for in your 2010 address at Kennedy Space Center.

Mr. President, I'm a little older than you and can vividly remember the excitement in the country and around the world as NASA achieved remarkable milestones in space during the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo programs, culminating in the lunar landings. It spurred a generation of children to become scientists and engineers – fueling our country's competitiveness and economic success. We have the opportunity, or perhaps more accurately, you have an opportunity, to lead our international partners in a similar moment for this generation, but we have to act now.

It has been more than 40 years since the last U.S. landing on the Moon. It's time for us to go back. All that is missing is your leadership directing NASA to do so. Years from now, history will judge whether this administration took the steps to lead our international partners in a return to the Moon, or stood by while they aligned with governments with far different values and distinctly different aims.

Speaking before Congress in 1961, President Kennedy called the nation to embrace a "great new American enterprise." He reminded us that we possessed, "all the resources and talents necessary. But the facts of the matter are that we have never made the national decisions or marshalled the national resources required for such leadership." The same is true today. Joining with other partners, we have the capabilities and without question we possess the talent. All that is missing from the equation is the leadership. I urge you to take this opportunity to direct the U.S. space programs towards a lunar-focused human exploration program that will reaffirm America's space leadership for the 21st Century.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

THIS IS A SINCERE
GOOD FAITH REQUEST
WHAT I-NOW WOULD
BE GOOD FOR THE
COUNTRY. THANK YOU