

Continue to fund nasa

[Science](#), [Astronomy](#)



The wreckage of the ship and the remains of her seven crew members were strewn all across Texas and parts of Louisiana. Even the most staunch NASA believers contemplated their support for the agency as fire rained from the sky. It had been nearly 17 years since the last fatal disaster of the Challenger explosion, and this served as another frightening reminder that space travel till is not safe.

The incident caused the question that everyone asked themselves that day: Is the journey Of space travel and exploration worth the sacrifice of human lives? This line of thinking has ultimately lead to the debate over whether we, as American tax payers, should continue to fund NASA in its mission to explore and understand the universe. I propose that NASA is not only an important part of our government, but an absolute critical piece of our development as a human species. We are a race destined for the stars, and the formation of agencies like NASA were the first steps to that end.

To better understand NASA, we have to look at the agency from its inception. NASA was essentially born out of fear of Soviet space superiority. On October 4, 1957 the Soviet Union launch the worlds first artificial satellite into space by the name of Sputnik (Gerber, Lanais). As a direct result, almost exactly one year later NASA was formed with 8, 000 employees and a 1 00 million dollar budget. The initial goal of NASA was to make up lost ground on the Soviets in the space race, but on May 25, 1961 President John F Kennedy gave NASA its prime directive: put a man on the moon and bring him back feely before the end of the decade.

With an astonishing pace and efficiency, that goal was achieved on July 20, 1969 when Neil Armstrong took his first steps on the moon and gave his famous "One Small Step for Man" speech. At that time, the whole country was behind NASA and its mission. The very act of putting a man on the moon changed our society in many ways. Man was no longer bound to the Earth, and it changed our perception of the universe. Exploration of space and the stars seemed within our grasp. It looked like only a matter of time before the common man would be colonizing the moon. Fast forward almost forty years later and we find that Man has not been back since.

The notion that we were able to send a man to the moon in eight years, but spend the next forty idly by on Earth and our low orbit space stations does not sit well with some. And, if you are just looking at the small picture of manned space travel, it would seem that NASA is moving at a snail's pace. Since the last moon landing, Man has not moved an inch past our low orbit space stations. When looking at faults, there are many to be found as to why this has occurred. The first thing we can look at is the faltered support NASA received from our entry in the past few decades.

When Americans started dying for the cause, we all slowly started losing our taste for space travel. This also occurred when we realized the high cost of sending man into space. The public does not see the benefits of sending a man to the moon again, as the "been there, done that" mentality has prevailed. This is especially apparent as of late when Obama just recently canceled the Constellation Program, which aimed at getting a man back on

the moon by 2020 (Atkinson). The ultimate goal was to start towards building a lunar base from which we could launch other space sessions from.

Yet, even though we had already spent 9 billion dollars on the project, it was axed. NASA was cited as "over budget, behind schedule, and lacking in innovation due to a failure to invest in critical new technologies." Instead, NASA was urged to invest and inspire the centralization of space flight (Belton). This comes about because the space shuttle fleet will be retiring this year, and the US will be entirely reliant on the Russian space agency to ferry our astronauts to the International Space Station for the next few years. It is suggested that spurring growth in this sector will achieve

Beam's angle of creating jobs and will be better economically than sending our money to Russia. While I find the centralization of space flight a step in a good direction, I believe the cancellation of the Constellation program shows an enormous lack of foresight on the Obama administration's part. While this move harkens back to when the government spurred growth in commercial aviation sector by use of the Airmail initiative (Simmers 2), one must realize that the money is just not there yet for commercial study and exploration.

The projects NASA have undertaken have required massive budgets with usually very little monetary return. This is not necessarily the arena for private industry, who have a bottom line to worry about. There has been much outcry as to the cost of supporting NASA through public funding. This year NASA's budget actually increased 6% to just under 18 billion dollars, which to some, are not being spent wisely. It is unfortunately true that NASA

has become the government agency that nobody wanted it to be: big, bloated, inefficient and expensive.

It seems it has fallen into the pit that most other government agencies have. For proof of this we can look at Anna's latest Mars rover project, the Mars Science Laboratory (MSL). The rover was supposed to launch near the end of 2009 and now has been delayed (twice) to 2011 (Chance). The budget for this project was approved at 1.6 billion but now is projected to surpass 2.2 billion by launch. Even if you look at Anna's more recent success stories the public has been asking "is it worth it?" The Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity launched in 2003 and were expected to last only 6 months.

Six years later and we find they are still operating on Mars and sending back data. At a total cost of ~944 million for a six year mission, you could say that's a bargain (Chivies). Yet, there are many who wonder how soil samples and weather patterns on Mars help us when there are many more issues down on Earth that need attention. Some have urged for the slashing and outright abolishment of NASA in favor of shifting its budget to other social programs like welfare, national healthcare and education.

While I am not debating whether or not these programs need more funding, I am stating that diminishing Anna's budget and overall presence would be a huge blow to the development of the ISS and the human race as a whole. When looking at the overall governmental spending budget, NASA is only a drop in the bucket, totaling only less than 1% (Change). Compare that to the height of the Apollo missions that took 5% of the budget, it shows that

today's program is affordable. The national defense budget is nearly 40 times that of Anna's.

While NASA does not directly work towards the hyphenation of space (that is the Air Force's domain), maintaining space superiority does lend to our country's defense. One can only imagine if Russia or China gains the upper hand. Regardless, the minute anis we might see by diverting Anna's funding elsewhere would be greatly outweighed by the detrimental effects this would have on our country and perhaps the world. So far you might say there haven't been many pro's for NASA that have been presented. The fruits of Anna's labors really fall into two categories: tangible and intangible.

The intangible gifts that NASA has given us are really the hardest to defend as they may not directly benefit us. For instance, NASA has discovered more than 300 explants (planets orbiting stars outside our solar system) and are still finding new and better ways to detect them Cowmen). They recent launched the Keeper space telescope that will aid us in finding even more explants. The knowledge that there are definitively more planets outside our solar system, while not surprising, does nothing for us now and helps no one at the moment.

Yet, the information we might glean from these explants may perhaps unlock how planets are formed in our universe; and may even give a glimpse into how life is formed. One cannot put a price tag on expanding the human understanding of the universe. But, knowing how life or planets are formed do not help the starving or the dying. For those who do not care that Uranus has 1000 MPH wind speeds or that at the center of every galaxy there may

be a super massive black hole; we must look at the direct and tangible presents that NASA has bestowed on our society.

Many, many innovative technologies have been directly and indirectly created by NASA in pursuit of its goals. If you get lost in the woods and your GPS leads you back to safety; you can thank NASA for that. If MR. scan catches the early stages of cancer and you get to live a full life because of it, you can thank NASA (Change 2). If your fire alarm goes off and you can get out of your house before it is engulfed in flames; again, you can thank NASA. If you have an ear thermometer, cell phone, satellite TV or cordless drill; you can thank in whole or in part, NASA.

The technologies NASA has given the world has not only made life easier, but has saved countless lives as well. Let's not forget Anna's enormous contributions to meteorology either, which have not only saved lives but have helped the agricultural sector as well. All these things we may not have come about if NASA hadn't help create them as a means to their end. If all of Anna's contributions to humanity have not swayed you then reaps nothing will. You must take into account this though; that the fate of the entire world and the human race may be on NASA's shoulders.

I'm sure you have all seen movies like Armageddon and Deep Impact, and believable or not these Earth striking comets are a very real possibility. The only way we will have fair warning if this comes to pass will be through the efforts of agencies like NASA. The only organizations even considering the possibilities and contingency plans are those like NASA. This is not fear mongering either; the widely accepted notion that Earth has been hit by a

comet before exulting in the extinction of species like the dinosaurs is proof enough that it is possible.

It may very well be that one day NASA saves the Earth from destruction, and we will breathe a sigh of relief that we kept them around. When it's all said and done, we need NASA. They have given us so much in the way of knowledge and technological advancements that we shouldn't turn our backs on them now. Granted, they are not perfect and do have many glaring flaws. Perhaps they need a restructuring or new leadership to get them back on the path. The fact remains that we are indebted to NASA for helping us grow technologically and as humans looking up wide-eyed at the sky.