



News release

Contact: Kathryn Cooper
Communications Manager
P.O. Box 58724
Houston, Texas 77258-8724
Phone: 281.486.5535
Fax: 281.486.5068
Email: kathryn@bayareahouston.com
Visit: www.bayareahouston.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 10, 2010

America's complacency forecasts demise of world leadership

For all of my life, I have seen other countries striving to be like America. Now, it seems, we strive to be like them. This reminds me of the 70s and early 80s when our educational gurus in Washington decided that we needed to eliminate all of the advanced and accelerated classes in our school systems. They did not want the children to think that some of their peers might be smarter or learn more quickly than others. It was decided to put all of the children in one classroom regardless of their abilities, making the teacher's task of bringing each child to his or her fullest potential much more difficult. This is what I refer to as "dumbing down."

Today we ask why our children are not more interested in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) classes. I believe that they don't want to appear to be different than their classmates. They don't want to be scorned as an oddity. Our schools have been working for more than 15 years to reverse this thought process, but it is going to take longer to undo the damage that was previously done.

As demonstrated by the administration's proposed 2011 budget that was recently released, we still have much to learn. We have now gone from dumbing down a generation to the dumbing down of America's leadership. This presidential administration and its political appointees have killed the one thing that can excite and inspire young Americans to return to studying for STEM careers – NASA's human spaceflight program. The administration has given the world one more reason to strive **not** to be like America.

NASA Administrator Charlie Bolden was quoted this past weekend as saying, "NASA is committed to flying beyond Earth's orbit, but it may not happen until 2030." The key element of this statement is "may not happen." Two decades of human spaceflight will be lost. America's position as a world leader will vanish along with the source of inspiration for an entire generation of our youth.

NASA is partly to blame for the complacency of the American people. It has two main problems. First of all, since its inception more than 50 years ago, NASA has made the most difficult job in the world look easy. Secondly, by legislation, NASA is prohibited from effectively marketing itself. These interrelated problems have resulted in the American people taking NASA and its far reaching accomplishments for granted.

In closing, I want to emphasize that my comments are not a political statement. The 2008 NASA budget passed Congress by a vote of 409-15 in favor of human space exploration. Very clearly, the battle we are facing in regard to the proposed 2011 budget and the cancellation of NASA's human spaceflight program is not about Democrats and Republicans. It is all about America's position in the world. The country that sets the pace in space exploration is the same country that the world looks to for leadership. Do we lead or do we follow? This is a choice that we can still make.

Bob Mitchell
President
Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership
Houston, Texas

The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership is a member-driven organization that provides the leadership to stimulate regional economic development and employment in southeast Texas. Its members include more than 260 investor companies, business professionals, local governments, and educational institutions encompassing 13 cities, Galveston and Harris counties, and the Port of Houston Authority. Visit www.bayareahouston.com.

Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program is administered by the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership. It is a State of Texas funded initiative designed to transfer the knowledge and technology of the U.S. Space Program to small businesses to solve technical challenges they are unable to solve themselves. Visit www.spacetechnologies.com/bahep.