



News release

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Op-Ed

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Challenging times present new opportunities

BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS – The term “challenging times” has been used so frequently over the last few years that I hesitate to use it once again. Even so, these two words encompass much of what the world is experiencing on so many different levels. Texas, with an enviable unemployment rate and very favorable business climate compared to that of the rest of the country, is certainly neither immune nor inexperienced when it comes to matters of economic uncertainty.

Here in Bay Area Houston we’ve been riding a roller coaster of emotions for the past year in regard to the future of NASA and human space exploration. We’ve been involved in “a wait and see” scenario coupled with months of intense activity. Last summer we waited anxiously for the results of the Augustine Panel and felt encouraged by the results. Then February arrived and brought with it the administration’s proposed FY2011 budget that virtually eliminated NASA’s human space exploration program.

As of this writing, the Senate, through the leadership of Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, has passed a bill which is much more favorable to maintaining this nation’s preeminence in space. The House still has to pass its own version of the bill, and then a compromise bill will need to be passed by both chambers and sent to the president for his signature.

The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership has actively pursued many initiatives to ensure that America maintains the high ground in space. Our world leadership is at stake, and, thankfully, Congress recognizes this, as well, demonstrating bipartisan support that is vital to change the disastrous course previously set for NASA. I continue to be optimistic that the enormous amount of work that we have done, in conjunction with the efforts of thousands of people across the U.S., will be well rewarded with a 2011 budget that supports, rather than dismantles, NASA.

Of course, these challenging times have involved industry segments across the board. Manufacturing, housing, real estate, health care, biotechnology, , specialty chemical, alternative energy - large companies and small - are all hoping for a more positive turnaround in the economy to occur sooner than later. Economists offer differing opinions on this, but one thing is certain, we will get through the tough times and be much more resilient down the road because of them.

There's another certainty that is becoming more apparent every day. Our challenging times are presenting opportunities for advancement in other areas. New collaborations are being formed that may not have happened for several years, if at all, had we not been faced with the economic necessity of "sink or swim."

There has always been a positive outcome when this country faced economic disasters in the past. Even as recently as the 1980s, when the oil bubble broke, Texas suffered significant losses. We rebuilt the state's economic base, including industries outside of the oil patch. This diversification has benefited every Texan, and I am certain that recent economic events will result in a stronger and smarter nation as a whole.

Does this mean that we're out of the woods? No, I don't think that we can ever stop being diligent in finding better ways to do things not only for ourselves but for everyone on this planet. As these challenging times have clearly shown, we are all interconnected. Let us learn from the past and move forward toward new opportunities that lie ahead.

Bob Mitchell
President
Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership

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.