



**News release**

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## Is Our Nation's Future in Space at Risk?

by Lieutenant General Jefferson D. Howell, Jr., USMC [ret]



**BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS** – As I observe the continued debate over America's space program, it appears that one of our nation's most coveted and prestigious capabilities is being threatened due to claims of being unaffordable and unachievable. This concerns me, as it should many of you.

Having had the distinct honor of serving as a member of two of our nation's most admired national assets, The U.S. Marine Corps and NASA's Johnson Space Center, I regard the U.S. Human Spaceflight Program as having a critical role in our nation's future as a world leader. I believe that what the Marines are to our national defense, the space program is to our technological and economic primacy.

Great nations do great things, and human space exploration is a distinct signal of America's greatness. It is part of the essence of our national identity. No other nation has sent humans to the moon. No other nation has yet to surpass that accomplishment. I believe that abrogation of our human space program will

be a clear signal to other nations, as well as to ourselves, that we as a people no longer seek to be the world's leader in achieving great things.

Our nation needs to maintain a strong, viable space industry to move us expeditiously into the future. A private, commercial space program is a commendable goal worthy of pursuing in the long term. However, given the inherent risks and costs driven by the limits of current technology, it is imperative that a viable government funded space program remains in the forefront of this effort. To retain our leadership in space, the U.S. must promptly develop a replacement for its current Space Transportation System to set our nation on the course to increasingly challenging human exploration missions in space. The most prudent, expeditious and affordable solution is to continue development of Orion as the Multipurpose Crew Vehicle while developing the nation's new Space Launch System. These NASA programs will provide the safest and most technologically advanced systems designed to date and prove to other nations the U.S. is economically capable and committed to remaining the frontrunner in space exploration and technology.

NASA is critical to our future success as a nation. It inspires us; it drives us to overcome seemingly unachievable technical challenges, and it demonstrates to other nations that we still have the ability to accomplish what we start. To further reduce our commitment to the ongoing development of our national space exploration program would pose a threat to the investment we have made in our valuable assets and cede our U.S. leadership in space.

I urge our nation's leaders to keep our national pride intact, continue forward progress and give us another space program of which Americans can be proud.

*Howell is a retired U.S. Marine and served as director of the Johnson Space Center from 2002 to 2005. He is currently an adjunct faculty member at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas in Austin.*

**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](http://www.bayareahouston.com).

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