



News release

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Legislative staffers given 'vision for the future' in support of NASA

BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS – The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has made its vision for space exploration clear by stating, “NASA is charting a bold new course into the cosmos, a journey that will take humans back to the Moon, and eventually to Mars and beyond.” Legislative support, from both state and federal governments, is critical to the success of this vision. Texas State Rep. John Davis, a long-time supporter of NASA, arranged for a group of 37 staff members from the Texas legislature to take a tour of NASA-Johnson Space Center on Oct. 27 so that they could gain a more thorough understanding of the importance of this country’s space program. Meghan Weller from Rep. Davis’ office facilitated the tour.

The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership’s Aerospace Advisory Committee has been a long-time supporter of NASA as well. The AAC hosted the group, which boarded a bus early that morning in Austin where they returned later in the evening. Between the long bus rides, though, they learned a great deal about the importance of NASA to the future of this country.

Bob Mitchell, BAHEP president, welcomed the staffers to a pre-tour luncheon held at Space Center Houston. During a presentation later in the luncheon, Mitchell emphasized that the partnership has a close relationship of long standing with NASA, one that is currently governed by a Memorandum of Understanding with JSC.

He spoke to the legislative group about TOP, the Technology Outreach Program that was established in 1999. Mitchell explained that the mission of the TOP Program is to take technology from NASA’s Johnson Space Center and transfer it back to small businesses in order to help them grow and expand their business opportunities. He said, “About 10 years ago we partnered with the Johnson Space Center and visited with State Sen. Mike Jackson and State Reps. John Davis and Craig Eiland to talk with them about the program. With their help, we received funding from the State of Texas for the first time.”

The program was so successful that after two years it received federal funds to expand and become SATOP, the Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program, and went statewide. Currently, engineers from 19 companies donate up to 16,000 hours each year to help small businesses. There are 29 Economic Development Organizations across the state that promote SATOP. To date, the program has assisted over

600 Texas businesses with an economic impact of \$125,000,000. Additional information about SATOP can be found at www.spacetechnologies.com/bahep.

Before concluding, Mitchell spoke about another important initiative of the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership – acquisition of a space shuttle. He said, “In 2010 the space shuttle fleet is scheduled to retire. Over 300 astronauts will have flown over 315 million miles in the shuttle fleet, and every single astronaut has trained at the Johnson Space Center. It’s important to secure one of the shuttles, and we’re specifically looking at the Discovery.” A team has already formed and spoken with more than 60 elected officials and community leaders. Several states are interested in obtaining a shuttle, Mitchell reported, and the states that can showcase them most effectively will be successful. He told the staffers, “It’s going to take more than corporations and individuals to be successful at this. We’re going to need the help of the legislature as well.” The group was unanimous in declaring that no one could be better at displaying the Discovery than the Johnson Space Center, home of the human space flight program.

Joe Mayer, senior manager of business development for Lockheed Martin, also addressed the group saying, “We need a vision for the future while keeping an eye on the crises of the moment. That’s why we invest in space.” Lockheed Martin, which sponsored the luncheon, is the prime contractor for the Orion crew exploration vehicle – the space craft that will take humans back to the moon and on to Mars. Mayer reported, “The state, through the Texas Enterprise Fund, invested \$4 million in this effort to bring new jobs and facilities here. We’ve created almost 600 new jobs in this community as part of the Orion Program. We are also on the way to investing over \$50 million in facilities and capabilities in the Houston area. Lockheed Martin has magnified that investment of TEF money 10 times over in terms of our own investment. I appreciate the support that we’ve received from the state and from BAHEP, which served as a valuable intermediary for us with the state. It’s been a great collaboration for a great program. There are more jobs here in Houston rather than in Denver because of the TEF. Thank you very much in that regard.”

Another speaker stressed the value of the Texas Aerospace Scholars program. Susan White, director, Johnson Space Center Office of Education, had been a high school teacher for 10 years in the Pearland Independent School District. She told the staffers that she is not only very familiar with but passionate about the program as well. White explained that through a combination of state, federal, and private sector funding, TAS provides Texas students and educators opportunities to explore science, technology, engineering, and math, with space exploration as its central theme. Since 1999, more than 6,600 Texans have participated in TAS. The former Pearland teacher gave a very informative talk about the different aspects of the program and referred the group to www.aerospacescholars.jsc.nasa.gov for more details.

If a picture is worth 1000 words, then a VIP tour of NASA must be worth millions. Following the luncheon, the group boarded the bus again for the very short trip to the Johnson Space Center where they were greeted by Dr. Ellen Ochoa, former astronaut and now deputy director of JSC. They saw the flight control room for the International Space Station, the mission control room from the historic Apollo era, and the space vehicle mockup facility. The latter contains ISS and space shuttle trainers, a Russian Soyuz trainer, and a Constellation / Orion mockup. The last stop on the tour was the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory located at the Sonny Carter Training Facility. This 6.2 million gallon pool simulates weightlessness for astronaut training.

Thanks to the efforts of Rep. Davis and BAHEP’s Aerospace Advisory Committee, by the end of the day the 37 travelers from Texas’ legislative offices had heard and been shown many, many reasons to support NASA and to share its vision for the future. They took these back with them to Austin as they prepare for the next legislative session which begins in January.



Bob Mitchell, president of the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, gave a presentation to staff members of the Texas legislature on the Space Alliance Technology Outreach Program. TOP was established 10 years ago to transfer the knowledge gained from the space program to help small businesses grow and expand their opportunities. The program was expanded to SATOP in 2001.



Joe Mayer spoke to a group of 37 Texas legislative staffers who toured NASA on Oct. 27. Mayer is senior manager of business development for Lockheed Martin, the prime contractor for the Orion crew exploration vehicle.



State Rep. John Davis organized an Oct. 27 NASA tour for a group of 37 staff members from the Texas legislature so that they could gain a more thorough understanding of the importance of this country's space program. The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership's Aerospace Advisory Committee hosted the travelers.



Susan White, director, Johnson Space Center Office of Education, made a presentation to the Austin group of 37 legislative staffers on the Texas Aerospace Scholars program.



Brian Freedman, lower right, from NASA's Community and Government Relations Office of External Relations, is shown giving a tour of the historic Apollo era mission control room. Thirty-seven legislative staffers from Austin spent the day at Space Center Houston and NASA touring the facilities and learning about the benefits of the nation's space program.