

Remarks from Co-Chairs Jonathan Lunine and Mitch Daniels at the Apr. 22nd, 2013 meeting of the Committee on Human Spaceflight

We would like to take a few moments before we begin this meeting to remind our audience and those presenting to us today about the purpose and goals of the study in which we are engaged. We have received some indications of uncertainty among the various communities impacted by this effort and so we would like to take this opportunity to touch on some points that will clarify the primary goals of our activities. We should add that we welcome all inquiries from the communities interested in this study, and the inputs we have received to date have been helpful. We value and welcome dialogue with the communities and stakeholders involved and will be outlining shortly further opportunities for making such input.

This task for this committee originated in the NASA Authorization Act of 2010, which required that the National Academies perform a human spaceflight study that would review “the goals, core capabilities, and direction of human space flight”. As we heard at our first meeting last December, this language reflected concerns that—without an accepted and independent basis for the establishment of long term goals—political cycles and other factors would continue to drive instability in the human spaceflight program.

As called for in the congressional task language, the members of this committee represent a broad spectrum of expertise covering civil, commercial, international, scientific, economic, cultural, and national security aspects of spaceflight. The committee was formed from a large list of initial candidates – over 500.

The committee has been organized by the NRC following a broadly based period of consultation and with the goal to enable a broad array of points of view and subject matter expertise to be brought to bear on a very complex problem that is reflected in our ambitious statement of task. I won’t re-read it here – it can be read online at www.nationalacademies.org/humanspaceflight, but I will show it up on the screen for those of you in the room to look at.

We as co-chairs are particularly grateful to all members who are devoting a significant fraction of their time and expertise without compensation to the pursuit of our task. In particular, those individuals without significant experience of the exploration of space have worked hard to educate themselves about this subject matter in a very short period of time.

In the course of addressing this set of tasks, the committee has convened a technical panel and public and stakeholder opinion panel, and at our meetings we are calling on a large number of experts to testify to the committee. At times, this means that the panels or committee may “drill down” into particular subject areas – technical challenges associated with various mission architectures, for example – or questions pertaining to economic considerations – or issues having to do with planetary or microgravity science. We should add that the technical panel’s main goal is assisting

the committee in understanding the technical challenges of various exploration pathways and the opinion panel is collating and gathering information on stakeholder and public attitudes about human spaceflight.

These are examples – and there will be others – that represent a sampling of areas of inquiry that the committee must explore to complete its job. No single one of them should be taken to represent a particular “emphasis” by the committee, nor should the selection of individuals or organizations invited to speak with panels or the committee be interpreted as representative of a particular “direction” of the committee on the whole. Indeed, we would ask that you, like us, view our inquiries as part of a methodology designed to bring as much information to light in a very short period of time as we can, and to organize it in a manner that is as useful to the committee’s deliberations as possible.

In addition to these activities, we recognize the importance of a general effort to reach out to the communities interested in human spaceflight. In addition to these open sessions at our meetings and the provision of information on our website, we will shortly be issuing a call for white papers that will be open to any and all interested individuals and groups. This call will pose broad questions that allow stakeholders and members of the public to submit their own ideas on the role of human spaceflight and suggest solutions for its future. Because participants will be self-selected, these white papers cannot be used to judge the prevalence of attitudes or opinions, however, they will help ensure that the committee hears about the important issues before us from a diverse set of interested parties. Please look for such a call on the study website in the coming weeks.

I hope this is helpful clarifying our work and the challenge it represents. We appreciate the input we have received from stakeholders and we look forward to more as the study progresses.