

The Republican Party and Space Exploration

When President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Aeronautics and Space Act in 1958, he began one of the most impressive and productive programs in world history. Just eleven years later Americans were standing on the surface of the Moon. Since then, Republicans have continued to be strong supporters of space exploration. Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush were tireless advocates for a strong American space program and in 2004, President George W. Bush put the United States on a bold new path that will return us to the moon and then send people to Mars.

Why should the GOP continue to support human space exploration?

Frontier Culture: Our country was largely built on exploration. Whether it was exploring and settling the vast territories of North America or frontiers of technology and innovation, we owe much of our greatness to our willingness to explore and solve problems. When great nations stop exploring, they inevitably begin to decline.

Technology: Since its inception, the space program has driven technology. Our society and economy has been transformed by technologies created by or enabled by the space program. We need to guarantee that our nation remains the technology leader.

Science: The possible scientific gain of such missions is unfathomable. Although robotic missions provide wonderful science, their contributions pale compared to what a human explorer can achieve in a fraction of the time. Humans have the best chance to find out whether humans can live on other planets, and if life ever existed on Mars and elsewhere in space. Learning about other planets can also potentially provide a plethora of information on how to better understand Earth.

Education: Space Exploration can revitalize American education. During the Apollo program, the number of scientific and technical degrees issued by American universities doubled. Many of the people who created the computer and communications revolution in the 1980s and 1990s were “children of Apollo.” If we engage in a bold new program that will send people to the Moon, Mars, and beyond, it is likely to have the same inspirational effect. People often ask why we are not graduating as many engineers and scientists as we once did. Children need to be inspired. They need to see that they can work toward a goal larger than themselves. A bold space initiative will provide that inspiration and create an environment that will make our education dollars far more effective.

National Morale: National morale is often not taken seriously. In reality, it is one of the most important factors in determining our prosperity. Unlike most federal agencies, the American public has an emotional bond to NASA. It is seen as a symbol of American know-how and success. If NASA is engaged in ambitious, challenging goals, it will serve as a tremendous catalyst for national self-esteem.

National Security: All of the items listed above have a dramatic impact on national security. We have been leaders in space since the Apollo program, so we have never considered the implications of the disadvantaged state we would be in if we fell behind. In addition, our space program is highly beneficial in promoting our image around the world. Regardless of how people in other nations regard our foreign policy, NASA is still viewed with awe and admiration around the world.

We've grown used to the idea of space, and, perhaps we forget that we've only just begun. We're still pioneers.
Ronald Reagan, 1986