

On the Nationâ€™s Space Program Position Paper: Letter Report

Space Science Board, Commission on Physical
Sciences, Mathematics, and Resources, National
Research Council

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NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

COMMISSION ON PHYSICAL SCIENCES, MATHEMATICS, AND RESOURCES

2101 Constitution Avenue Washington, D. C. 20418

SPACE SCIENCE BOARD

OFFICE LOCATION:
JOSEPH HENRY BUILDING
21ST STREET AND
PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.

May 12, 1986

Dr. James C. Fletcher
NASA Administrator
NASA Headquarters
Washington, D. C. 20546

Dear Jim:

The Space Science Board has prepared a position paper on the nation's space program. A copy is enclosed. The Board and space scientists in general have been concerned for a long time about the problem of access to space that has developed because of the policy that made the Space Transportation System the only effective means of launching scientific missions. In our view this policy has mixed the objectives of the manned and unmanned elements of the space program in ways that were seriously detrimental to each of them. We strongly recommend that this policy be changed drastically and that we move at once to primary reliance on Expendables to launch scientific missions of the future. We do not believe that a policy of relying on commercial launch vehicles would be to the benefit of space science. We urge that NASA become involved in developing the specifications for ELVs and contract for their production.

In the end we believe that, because the use of ELVs is inherently less costly than use of the shuttle for launching scientific payloads, this policy will not result in an overall increase in the price the nation must pay for its space program. However, as we state in our paper, we also believe that it is a fundamental mistake in national policy to let budget constrain the nation's space program in the way it has for the past fifteen years. The consequence of operating under such constraints is that we do not do things right. If a highly visible, prestigious activity like the space program is not carried out with flair and precision one can question whether it should be carried out at all. We would like this position paper to be read as a call to the nation to rededicate itself to a strong, exciting effort in space that will restore us to the position of leadership that some perceive we are in danger of losing. The Space Science Board will be pleased to work with you to help you reach that goal.

Dr. James Fletcher
May 12, 1986
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It is unfortunate that circumstances prevented us from discussing this matter with you before producing the final draft of this paper. We look forward to a strong interaction with you in the future. I myself shall be happy to come in to see you whenever you wish.

Yours sincerely,



Thomas M. Donahue
Chairman, Space Science Board

TMD/ds

Enclosure