

(July 9, 2013)

Press Conference on Human Spaceflight

On Monday July 8, Congresswoman Donna Edwards, ranking member on the House Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee addressed a small audience at an event, hosted by the Center for International and Strategic Studies, on the subject of the importance of the U.S. civilian space exploration program. She came to make an impassioned announcement that we need a “bold vision” and a “twenty-first century space innovation agenda.” She began by relating the impact that the Gemini, Mercury and Apollo missions had on her as a child and posed the challenge of hooking the next generation of young people. Afterwards she listed several benefits our space program has afforded us, including 7,000 jobs over eight years from the Curiosity mission alone, several spin offs from the Apollo era, such as emergency airbags, and, perhaps more importantly, the inspiration for children.

Edwards then laid out some challenges, pointing out that China has had their 5th manned mission and are heading to the Moon and Mars, while we in the United States have an increasingly aging workforce that is not renewing fast enough. The US has a responsibility to lead in the world because of its record of successful missions, which surpasses anyone.

While calling for a unified voice in defining a mission to Mars, she implied several disagreements with current policy. One came when Edwards pointed to the examples of Eisenhower and Kennedy who made goals not pre-restricted by budgetary concerns, and which those presidents thought they might live to see accomplished.

The second was an issue that has now been drawn across party lines. She stressed several times that we should define a broad mission for NASA and give them the funding, but we should not tell them how to accomplish it. Leave that to the scientists. This is in response to the current draft House NASA authorization bill which is

seen as too micromanaged. Following this she announced that the Democrats would be releasing their own NASA authorization bill later in the evening. This is the first time in history that the two parties have submitted their own authorization bills. A hearing will be held on the matter on Wednesday, July 10th.