

NASA OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

NASA News Briefing
"Human Space Flight Review"

Speaker:

NORMAN AUGUSTINE, Chairman,
United States Human Space Flight Program Committee

MICHAEL HAWES, Associate Administrator
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Moderated by **DOC MIRELSON**,
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11:35 a.m., EDT
Friday, May 8, 2009

NASA Headquarters

P R O C E E D I N G S

MODERATOR: Thank you very much, and good morning and good afternoon to you.

As Jody said, to get in the queue for asking questions, please press Star/1.

I am going to kick it off here with just a very brief opening. I am joined on the telecon today with Norm Augustine who is joining us from Germany, and also from NASA, Michael Hawes is also on the line.

Mr. Augustine is the proposed chairman of the review of the United States Human Space Flight Plans Committee. He will lead a panel of experts organized under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, which we call a FACA. I think most of you know that, and I think that many of you are familiar with Mr. Augustine's background.

The committee will be tasked with examining ongoing and planned NASA human space flight development activities and the potential alternatives that are out there.

That said, also, I just want to make sure that you know that Michael Hawes is our Associate Administrator of NASA's Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation, and as

most of you know, I am in Public Affairs. So, if you have any follow-on questions after this session, which will run approximately about 20 minutes, you can call me or e-mail me, and if any of you need those details, we can get that at the end.

That said, I would like to turn it over to Mr. Augustine for a few opening remarks, and we will start the Q&A.

Norm?

MR. AUGUSTINE: Thank you, Doc.

This is Norm Augustine, and I am very much looking forward to participating on this review of the Human Space Flight Program. We are in the process of assembling the team that I will work with in conducting the review, and when we do that, our principal focus is on having a balance of perspectives and also getting people with experience.

Our assignment, as you probably understand, is to provide a set of options that include considering the present course, of course, and options that are sensible, both from an economic and a technical standpoint, and while the review is ongoing, I am advised that NASA will be

continuing to support the existing program in the meantime.

We have a rather short time period to conduct our review. It is to be completed in August, and because of that, we are drawing heavily on prior work, on our own experience, as well as analyses, that we will be provided support from NASA and possibly others.

We will seek public input as we conduct our work, since this space program is so important to the public, and there is a lot of knowledge out there that we would like to benefit from.

Our instruction is to take a fresh independent look at the Human Space Flight Program and to go where the facts lead, and that is what we will try to do.

Obviously, the U.S. has excelled in the exploration and the utilization of space for a long time. It is a source of great pride to our nation, as well as, I might say, to myself. I have also long believed it should be a balanced program that includes both robotics and human involvement, and our focus will be on the human space flight aspect and that part of the robotics program that links directly to human space flight.

The President in his speeches has made rather

clear that he is very supportive of human space flight, that he believes it is important from an economic and a technical and a scientific leadership standpoint. I would certainly share that view, and I believe this is an important task. I look forward, as I say, to leading it.

With that said, I will turn it back to you and be happy to answer any questions that anyone might have.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you, Norm.

I think we have the first question from the Orlando Sentinel, Bobby Block.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Can you hear me?

MR. AUGUSTINE: Yes.

MODERATOR: We can hear you fine. Go ahead.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Mr. Augustine, I have got one question and a follow-up, if I am permitted, but the first question is I have heard from some engineers and some budget analysts who are working on the coalface of the existing program, and there was some concern about how they would be able to have input into the process and yet, at the same time, be guaranteed some kind of anonymity because they are concerned about possible reprisals. Have you thought through a mechanism of how people would be able to

talk to you in confidence at all?

MR. AUGUSTINE: Well, we have thought through how we could gain inputs, not because of any issue over reprisals, but just because we would like to gain input, and the sort of things we have in mind, we will be visiting various centers. We will be briefed by many people. We intend to set up a site on the Internet, a website where people can comment, and I assume there is a way they can do that anonymously, if they wish, but we will welcome public input and through the regular mail as well.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: The second question I had was about the terms of reference for this study. I wanted to know if it included Station, as well as commercial space, and if cost was going to be the overriding factor, i.e., in terms of the need to maintain, stay within the current projected budget.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Well, commercial space flight activities, of course, are a reality, and it is an important part of what we will be doing insofar as it affects what the government does. Our recommendations clearly go to the government.

With regard to cost, that is one of a number of

important issues. Certainly, safety, the ability to complete the missions, the importance of the missions, and what they cost all has to be balanced, as you well know, Bobby.

I think that I wouldn't emphasize any one fact. I think we have to bring all those issues into perspective.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Let me just reiterate. If you could, limit this to one question and one follow-up, please.

Next question is from Seth Borenstein from the Associated Press.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Yes. Thank you so much for doing this, Mr. Augustine.

What I am wondering about is what is ruled out of what you are looking at. In other words, are you assuming that on two specific issues, is Shuttle -- are you going to look at whether the Shuttle should be retired after 2010, or is that one of the -- or is that a given, and the same with is the Moon a goal -- and on to Mars, and is that a given, or will you actually also reexamine those two sort of core issues of should these be goals or not?

MR. AUGUSTINE: That is a good question. The fundamental guidance that we have been and that we are very comfortable with is that we are to take a fresh look and go where the facts are and basically call it the way we see it.

Having said that, there is one boundary condition none of us can do anything about, and that is we are where we are. We have programs underway. There are systems existing and being built, and so that is sort of a starting condition, which doesn't mean that you have to abide by it in the future, but you can't ignore it as a starting position, obviously.

So we are in the process in this country of shutting down the Shuttle Program. One can't ignore that fact. On the other hand, we are an independent group, and I think if we found some significant new consideration that bore on any issue, we wouldn't likely be very reluctant to point that out. In fact, we would think that was our duty.

With regard to the program, the Moon program and so on, our rather clear guidance is that the long term is open-ended, and that we are free to look at -- I think the terms of reference we have heard are the things beyond

near-Earth orbit. To me, that would include interesting things everywhere, and I don't mean to start a prediction here because that is not my purpose, but everything from synchronous orbit to the Moon, to Mars, and beyond.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: And to follow up, you talked about being -- the one boundary being where we are and that there is work already being done. NASA has already spent \$6.9 billion -- with a "B" -- dollars on the Constellation program and is spending \$300 million a month. How big a factor do you see that being? In other words, is this at the point where it is just too late to change or cancel because too much money has been thrown down one way?

MR. AUGUSTINE: You know, the amount of money that has been spent would not be a consideration to us.

What would be a consideration is where we stand today, what hardware is available, what plans are available and so on, and how that might play into what we do in the future.

What has been said in the past, as I think any good economist would say, is probably not an issue to us. What the implications are for the future are of significant implication.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Seth.

Bill Harwood from CBS News, please.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Yes. Thank you very much.

One question, a follow-up. Mr. Augustine, I am curious as to how you sense the motivation for this study, and what I mean is -- I mean, there are three years into Constellation. There's a five-year gap staring at them. All of this stuff is in work. They have done lots of reviews in the past, and you have been tasked to come in and do something in 60 or 90 days that in theory, anyway, could rewrite manned space flight. I am curious as to is there something wrong with Constellation that the administration believes just needs this look. I mean, how do you see the overall motivation for the study?

And I have a follow-up in that context.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Bill, the administration, of course, would have to speak for itself, but you just said what was my view, and I will try to answer that, and that is that we are planning to spend billions of dollars on the space flight program, and it is wise to be sure

occasionally whether or not we are spending that the way we should.

New information becomes available all the time, and certainly, we have a new administration. It would probably be imprudent on their part not to examine this major of a program, to be sure that such a long-term undertaking is still on a course that makes sense to them.

That would be their call, obviously, but it does have an important impact on technology and competitiveness and nation's input -- image -- excuse me -- and so it is important we get it right.

And I think I guess I would observe that there is never a perfect time to conduct such a study as this. The train is in motion, and it seems like this is as good a time as any.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thanks.

And my one follow-up is kind of like a parallel to Seth's question. How do you guys view the gap? Meaning, what I mean by that is, I have covered space a long time, and obviously, you have been in the business longer than most of us, and it is hard to believe that another system could come in place that would not extend

the gap.

I am curious as to whether any of that is a factor in you deliberations. In other words, the period between Shuttle and whatever the other system is, is that a factor to you guys?

Thanks.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Bill, in spite of your reference to the fact that I am getting older and have been in the business a lot longer than you and the rest, I will forgive you. Let me try to answer that, though.

I must confess as an individual, that I speak as a private citizen, I am not thrilled with the fact that we have a gap, but we have what we have, and that is a question of how we wish to deal with that. There are things that could be done probably that would shorten the gap. There are some things that one might do that would probably lengthen the gap, but, certainly, an objective, I think, of anybody would be to balance the various pros and cons of whatever is proposed, I guess the impact on the gap, among other things, and recognizing that extending the gap is probably not a desirable thing. On the other hand -- and I am not making predictions here because I don't

know the outcome, but it is not something that is written in stone either.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Bill.

Todd Halvorson, how are things down there in Florida at Florida Today?

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Todd Halvorson, Florida Today.

Things are going well. The countdown is going to pick up at 4:00 p.m. for STS-125.

The question I have, Mr. Augustine, is how do you think this review will be either similar or different from the work done by the census [ph] group back in 1990?

MR. AUGUSTINE: Well, Todd, that, too, is a good question. That group's work, of course, was done nine years ago, and we will go through it very carefully and review it.

There has been changes in technology and budget outlooks and so on in the meantime, and I think there have been a number of studies conducted, some since then. This, I think, will be the principal independent one since that time, which makes it a bit different, but we will rely on it, as well as other studies that have been done, and try to come up with our best view as of 2009 as to what makes

sense going forward.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: And if I could just have a quick follow-up, please. I was just curious about how you ended up getting this job.

MR. AUGUSTINE: I was wondering that myself, Todd. You probably can answer that as well or better than I, but I was asked if I would do this, and aside from full-time employment, if I can help our government, I generally have tried to do that, and this is one of those cases, and I do think it's important to the country, and I am honored to have a part.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Todd, for the update down there too.

Stuart Powell from the Houston Chronicle.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Yes. Good morning.

MODERATOR: Good morning.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: I wanted to ask you whether the extent of this study could possibly reopen the architecture issue and throw open the contract bidding by other firms who have been waiting for a chance for the review as a possible opening to getting back in.

MR. AUGUSTINE: That is probably a question that

ESO, but from the perspective of our committee, we will be looking at different architectures, as well as the existing architecture, and I am not in a position to make any predictions. So, unless NASA wants to add something to that, I'm afraid that is about all I have to offer.

DR. HAWES: Well, I would just add, Norm, you are exactly right. Any contract action or change is all dependent on the outcome of the review and the ultimate acceptance of the recommendations and comments from the review by NASA and the administration.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: And a second question is, to what extent do you think as an outcome of this study, the space program will now be the Obama space program rather than the Bush space program?

MR. AUGUSTINE: Again, as you know very well, these space programs are the kinds of thing that take a long time, and they passed through several Presidential administrations and a large number of Congresses, as you know, and through a bunch of budgets. So I guess I would view this as being one of these things that it's America's space program, for which President Obama is currently responsible and will be for a number of years, I presume,

and that it really I don't think will have any one person's name on it particularly. It's America's space program.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

Just as a reminder, that other answer came from Michael Hawes, the NASA Associate Administrator for Program Analysis and Evaluation.

Moving on to Frank Moring from Aviation Week.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thank you, Mr. Augustine, for doing this.

To follow up on Stuart Powell's question, do you at this point know what options specifically you are going to be considering; for example, EELD or any of the others?

Also, could you please tell me about the size of the committee and what sort of secretariat you will have and just how it will be organized and conduct its affairs?

Thank you.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Frank, I would be glad to do that.

With regard to the size of the committee, it will be 10 members, as I say, with different perspectives and backgrounds, people who are willing to take new knowledge

and change their mind or learn from that new knowledge, if it is appropriate.

It will include, presumably, people that would be astronauts. It would be engineers that would have operational experience, people with industry backgrounds, government backgrounds, academic backgrounds and so on, which is hard to do with 10 people, but I think we will be able to put together a fine committee.

We will be supported at NASA by Dr. Mike Hawes, who you just heard speak, who will handle technical matters for us, and Phil McAlister will be our executive director and will handle the overall management, administrative, coordination aspects of what we do.

Frank, I forgot what the first part of your question was.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: That was the specific systems that you would be examining, alternatives to the existing system.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Right. The only system architecture that I could say that we will be examining with any confidence at this point is the existing one, and we will look at derivatives, and we have been asked to

provide options. I have no idea of how many. That to me means at least two but not a large number because I think it would be of no value to the administration for us to offer ten options. So there will probably be a couple options, a few.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you.

Let's move to Irene Klotz from Reuters, please.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thanks very much.

Mr. Augustine, it is Irene Klotz with Reuters.

About 20 years ago, you headed a panel that took a similar look at the future of the U.S. space program and at that time had recommended that the United States move on to the Moon as a stepping stone to Mars.

The first question I have is I am wondering if there is anything, I guess, personally that had changed your mind about that course of action.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Irene, I am going to try to take a very open mind and view of this and treat this study as a package in its own right, but the prior study did make a number of comments and recommendations. We spoke, as you will recall to the importance of return to the Moon and some of the hazards associated with Shuttle and the need

for a heavylift capability and the emphasis on science and things of that type, which I think, in general, are good principles, but every principle deserves to be reexamined.

So the issue is totally open as far as I am concerned.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thank you.

And then the follow-up to that is, in your looking at architecture of various systems to get to orbit, it would seem that it is very important to determine where you want to go and what you want to do before you can assess whether a particular architecture is suitable or not. So I am a little bit confused about which is the cart and which is the horse.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Well, that is exactly the challenge we face because this is an iterative process.

You know, it is one thing to set a goal and to put together an architecture and then discover you don't have the technology or the money to support it, and it is another thing to design an architecture but not know what it is you want to do in the end. So it will be an iterative process where we try to come up with a realistic solution that is important and useful, that is affordable and sustainable.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you.

We are coming up on our wrap-up here. I will take the last question, please, from Becky Iannotta from Space News.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thank you.

I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about how transparent this review team will be. Are you going to have public meetings and post documents on websites, or how are you going to go about keeping it?

MR. AUGUSTINE: It is my hope and it is the administration's guidance that this will be very open and transparent. Our meetings will be conducted under the FOIA rules, which basically says they will be public, except when you are dealing with a few issues like classified matters or personnel issues and things that bear on competitive sensitive matters. So I would think that our meetings would largely be public.

I would think that we will invite the public to comment at our meetings occasionally. We will seek input from the public on our website or through the regular mail, and as we travel around the country to various important sites, we will try to set a little bit of time aside at

each one to have public input there.

The challenge we face, obviously, is that the public is a very big body, but we do want to get input, and similarly, we would like to be very open about what we are doing.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Okay. And just one follow-up, if you have time for it.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Sure.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: I am a little confused, too, because there have been such a number of studies lately questioning the schedule and the cost of Constellation, and one of the guidelines in the letter requesting this review states that we want to look at this, the architecture and the options, but within the current budget profile.

So I am wondering, you know, how can Constellation get a fair review when we already have some cost concerns and that is one of the requirements for the report?

MR. AUGUSTINE: Yeah. I can see why that is confusing. Basically, we have been provided, as most of you probably know, with a budget that is the current budget for five years, out years, and we may, hopefully, even get

some insights in the years beyond that because it is such a long term.

I think what it boils down to is we are being told that there is no sense being unrealistic and putting together a program that can't possibly be afforded and we are being given some guidance.

I think one of the current problems that NASA has encountered over the years has been that it usually had more programs than it had money, and that could be dangerous when you are doing something as difficult as NASA does.

As we go through this evaluation, if we were to find that there were reason that the budget didn't make sense in any way, I can assure you, we would not be bashful about pointing that out, and I suspect the administration would want to know that anyway.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

MEDIA QUESTIONER: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you all. Mr. Augustine, thank you.

MR. AUGUSTINE: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Mr. Hawes, thank you.

Just as information for everybody, a replay of this teleconference will be available in approximately one hour. If you will dial, toll free, 866-395-1647 -- that is 866-395-1647 -- that is the toll-free number. The toll number for overseas participants is 202-369-0467 -- excuse me -- that is 203-369-0467.

Thank you all. As this progresses on the establishment of the FACA, of course, NASA will be putting out the administrative information on that. So stay in touch with us, and watch us online, and thank you all again for your time today. Have a great day. Thank you.

DR. HAWES: Thank you, Doc.

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