

Opening Remarks of Patti Grace Smith
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AIAA Symposium
*Innovations in Orbit: an Exploration of Commercial Crew and Cargo
Transportation*
June 18, 2009

It is indeed a pleasure to be here to moderate a panel on a topic that is very near and dear to my heart: *Innovations in Orbit: an Exploration of Commercial Crew and Cargo Transportation*.

Indeed, we as a country, as a nation, are at a critical crossroads. A thorough review of the literature of the past shows that in almost every field of endeavor, discovery and innovation, we have had a healthy appetite for the entrepreneurial spirit, and an even healthier, far more supportive, passion to ensure that it remains and flourishes.

What happened over the years, one might ask, that diminished this passion so? We might all come up with different answers and, no doubt, some of the same answers. Whatever the answer, one thing is for certain, today, America is losing the space race.

Our super power status as a nation is being challenged from multiple parts of the globe. Some may be further along than we even know when it comes to space.

Two thirds of our college classrooms in the science and engineering fields, as relates to aerospace, are occupied by foreign students, who graduate and take our technology know-how as taught in our classrooms home with them. It was noted several years ago that our own Air Force Academy is having difficulty attracting its students to go into aerospace engineering because they yearn for something more exciting to learn about, to even work on, like SpaceShip2 or WhiteKnight 2, and many of the other entrepreneurial-derived vehicle development programs.

If we are finally going to solve our nation's need to become more competitive space-wise, more innovative in our transport solution set, more committed to achieving the kind of technological breakthroughs we need, we must embrace the new space companies, the private sector, in a way we never have before. The mere fact that companies like SpaceX and others have put their own personal fortunes on the line to build a capability that advances our nation's position in the global frontier of space, we have an incredible opportunity to support and encourage their development by putting the nation's fiscal resources and political might behind them; and utilizing space, including entrepreneurial space, as a tool of foreign diplomacy. This will help demonstrate our will as a nation to have the kind of breakthroughs that are possible, as we advance and solidify our leadership in space.

Will we utilize and more fully support the private sector to help close the gaps we know exist? How much will we support private sector companies? Can commercial spaceflight be the answer to LEO? How exciting would it be to see a bifurcated approach to achievements in space with commercial spaceflight positioned as the answer to LEO and NASA focused on full ISS utilization and sustainable exploration beyond – a real, no kidding, public-private partnership?

Ladies and gentlemen, this is America.

I say that not with arrogance, but as a fact and with great pride and a desire for us to be better than we have ever been. I choose to believe that we do have the will to be the greatest when it comes to space. Each and every one of us has a role to play. Let's play it!