

The Moon Society opposes any Congressional ban on spending for "humans to Mars" programs

September 13, 2007

To Fellow Moon Society Leaders, fellow Moon Society members, and others who actively support a human return to the Moon and the establishment of an Earth-Moon economy

The proposed Congressional ban on spending for "humans to Mars" programs would seem to be in our favor. But as is often the case, first assessments can be quite off the mark.

On this matter, there are two schools of opinion

1. Hurray! We want to go to the Moon, not Mars!
2. Banning research on humans to Mars involves banning research that we need to SETTLE the Moon, not just revisit it.

I believe the second view is right on the money.

In my editorial in the December 2005 issue of Moon Miners' Manifesto, MMM #191, p 1. In Focus: Dear Santa: "a Moonbase made for Mars" I wrote the following.

Dear Santa: "a Moonbase made for Mars"

It's not about "what" we want!

It's about "the best strategy" to get what we want

It is sad to watch the continuing "debate trap" into which many devoted "Moon first" and "Mars first" true believers fall. For in truth, not only would either Moon or Martian settlement prove economically nonviable without each other as a trading partner, both face the very high likelihood of being stillborn, if not summarily aborted, if either one is pursued alone. Politics is the reality, and Collaboration the strategy.

Consider the track record. The President emasculated the International Space Station by summarily reducing its design manning from seven to three (when it takes 2.5 crew man time just to maintain the facility.) Yet he boasts that we have a Space Station.

A Moonbase, designed and pursued as an end in itself, would most likely suffer a similar fate. Reduced manning. No capacity to pursue resource utilization (oxygen production, cast basalt, metal alloys, building materials, etc.) We'd be able to boast that we have a "permanent" outpost on the Moon. Congress would care little, so long as it did not cost any more.

But if the goal is to build a workable Mars Base and try it out on the Moon first, then guess what we'd have?

- A life support system that went beyond umbilical cord style resupply, rescue, and repair, but had to work without relief for extended periods of time, two years or more. This most likely would involve a considerable greenhouse food-growing operation, something that could be easily dropped from a Moonbase-only program, given inevitable budget pressures.

- A design that had to take "shieldability" into account because the long stay times on Mars demanded such protection. On the Moon, in contrast, you could do without shielding if you rotated crews frequently enough.
- A robust machine shop and repair facility, because on Mars, one might have to fabricate a critical part if the last spare had been used.
- Development of an adequate power system not reliant on "eternal sunshine" which is something that would not be available on Mars. We might end up with a power system that would let us operate anywhere on the Moon, not just in the polar cul de sacs of "eternal sunshine."
- Inclusion of a superior medical facility that with aid of the latest computer software programs from Earth would allow treatment of almost any medical emergency. In a Moonbase-only operation, we'd have emergency transport back to Earth as a crutch to fall back on.
- Quicker development of expansion architectures that relied as much as possible on locally produced building materials, modules, and parts. In a Moonbase-only operation, we'd continue to rely on shipment of made-on-Earth modules (hard hull, inflatable, or hybrid) and parts.
- The living spaces would be more likely to include the perks and amenities needed to ensure sustained crew morale and productivity over yearlong plus stays. In a Moonbase-only operation, we'd make do with submarine style living standards, or less. Such perks are an essential step towards the introduction of optional re-upping, signing up for continued stay duty - one small step on the road to the first "settler."

I am sure there are still more points to make!

Looking farther ahead human settlements on both the Moon and Mars would be much more viable with each other as trading partners than if either sought viability alone.

The one thing that wannabe Lunans and wannabe Martians both don't seem to get, is that while Mars offers an atmosphere rich in oxygen, carbon, and nitrogen, plus a hydrosphere of unknown size, a more day-like rotation cycle, and other amenities, it remains initially a much harder nut to crack, because it lacks the one thing that the Moon offers: "location, location, location."

Ironically, however, that "location benefit" can and will serve as a crutch that will be used by bean counters and politicians to restrict full development of any "government" (national or multinational) outpost to the bare minimum to allow boasting that "we have one."

As President of Moon Society, I counsel other Moon Society leaders and members, and others in the Return to the Moon constituency, to consider that it is in our best interests as advocates of lunar outposts, and resource-using settlements that it is very much in our own best interests to ally ourselves with the well-articulated position of the Mars Society and The National Space Society, standing side by side with them, work in unison for "a Moonbase Designed for Mars."

It's not suicide. It's not a paradox. It's simply far and away the only strategy that makes sense. Now I suspect that younger readers and members (not old enough to have vividly remembered our retreat from the Moon at 8:42 p.m. EST on December 16, 1972) will disagree. But if you don't remember history, you are doomed to repeat it!

Let's not be fools. To one who lived through the Apollo era, the naiveté of many younger enthusiasts is both incredulous and discouraging. We must take the longer view, and that means playing our strategies to the hilt.

The Moon Society stands in opposition to the proposed Congressional ban on spending for "humans to Mars" programs.

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