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Academia, Government and Industry Reaching for the Stars

March 12, 2004

Edward C. "Pete" Aldridge, Jr.  
President's Commission on Implementation of  
U.S. Space Exploration Policy  
2900 South Quincy Street, Suite 800  
Arlington, VA 22206

Pete Aldridge:

On January 14, 2004, President George W. Bush challenged America to “set a new course for America’s space program,” and he noted, “We may discover resources on the moon and Mars that will boggle the imagination, that will test our limits to dream.” Similarly, midway through the 1800s, Congress realized that our still new nation of farmers needed colleges to continuously advance the agricultural and industrial arts and bring the benefits of higher education to all Americans. In 1850, over 90% of all Americans lived and worked on farms or supported agriculture. Today, less than 2% of Americans work in agriculture, less than 15% work in physical industries, and Americans are far wealthier and more secure.

Some Americans question the presidential challenge because, based on the history of the space program, they believe that Americans will not have an economic payback from Moon and Mars exploration programs. Since 1958, Americans have invested over 700 billion dollars in NASA programs. From that sum we have a work force and industries that can build and fly very large spacecraft, deploy industrial-scale facilities beyond Earth, and land sophisticated robots on the Moon, Mars, and asteroids. As a result of the Apollo and later lunar programs, we now understand that the known resources of the Moon are useful. We have clear visions of essential new lunar industries that will be energized by abundant and dependable solar power in space. However, virtually no NASA funding has been directed to learning how to create growing new wealth using the resources beyond Earth and how to enable widely accessible and sustainable net new wealth for the developed and developing nations.

In 1987, Congress enacted the National Space Grant College and Fellowship program to do *beyond Earth* what the Land Grant Colleges have done on Earth. Most Land and Sea Grant Colleges are in the fifty-two Space Grant Consortia. Given adequate resources and intense focus, the National Space Grant Colleges, working with industry and government, can adapt known technologies, provide new tools, and educate Americans to the new skills necessary to create new sustainable wealth on the Earth, its Moon, Mars, and beyond. New terrestrial and lunar industries can pay for a much larger scale of solar system exploration than is possible from Earth alone.

The Board of Directors of the Texas Space Grant Consortium requests that the *President’s Commission on Moon, Mars and Beyond* recommend that America utilize the wealth of intellectual capital in the nation’s universities by empowering and funding the National Space Grant Consortia to expeditiously do on the Moon and, later, throughout our solar system what the Land and Sea Grant Colleges have done for Americans on Earth.

Sincerely,

Texas Space Grant Consortium Board of Directors

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