

NASA ADVISORY COUNCIL
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Washington, DC 20546
Hon. Harrison H. Schmitt, Chairman

March 16, 2007

The Honorable Michael D. Griffin
Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Dr. Griffin:

Thank you very much for hosting the NASA Advisory Council at NASA Headquarters and also for joining the members for dinner during our meeting in Washington, DC from February 6-8, 2007. The Council was able to engage in very valuable fact-finding and public sessions and appreciated the opportunity to spend some time with you.

Though no formal Council recommendations came from this meeting, there was important discussion in the public session of which I think you should be aware. Many of the points discussed will certainly be explored further during subsequent meetings, and I am confident that you will be receiving several formal recommendations on these subjects in the future. For the time being though, the Council does not request a response from NASA to the issues identified below and none of these should be taken as full Council recommendations.

The topics are organized according to the Committee from which they originated and further background can be found in the meeting minutes.

Full Council

- Several members from various committees raised the current application of the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) as being a serious threat. The Council heard briefings on this subject from several individuals, both within and outside NASA. An ad-hoc committee of the Council will continue to focus specifically on potential recommendations for addressing the ITAR issues.

Aeronautics

- The Committee is concerned about fractured relationships with industry, universities, and other government agencies in terms of stakeholder outreach and collaboration that have developed over time. However, the Committee was very encouraged to see NASA engaging in new outreach efforts towards industry and universities, and noted that it is the responsibility of NASA and the Office of Science Technology and Policy to bring these parties together.
- There is a great deal of overlap with the technology challenges identified in the National Research Council's decadal aeronautics survey and NASA's policy and program. These synergies are stitched together with a high degree of consistency. There is a clear message that aeronautics is not a "sunset" industry, and a great deal of quality research is necessary to meet future needs.
- Future items of discussion for the Committee include the next Generation Air Transportation System and the Aeronautics Test Program.

Audit and Finance

- In financial systems and analysis, weaknesses continue in three control areas: access control; system software; and segregation of duties.
- In fund balances with treasury, NASA ended the year pretty much in balance.

- Future items of discussion for the Audit and Finance Committee include a review of NASA's financial and cost risk for Ares I and V, Orion, and the COTS and the International Space Station programs.

Exploration

- There appears to be strong leadership creating the transition imperative, policy, schedules, management processes, tools, etc.
- The Committee has started the major contractual review process. There was some fact-finding at this meeting and the Committee received some contract summary briefings. The Committee is planning to continue a review of contracts in advance of and at the April meeting of the Council

Human Capital

- There needs to be one consolidated message from NASA for the purposes of outreach and public relations. The Chief of Strategic Communications should be commended for his initial efforts to reorganize the NASA infrastructure to develop a single message from the Agency.
- It is encouraging that the Office of Education, as previously recommended, will focus more resources on attracting the "best and brightest" students.
- In upcoming meetings, the Committee will receive status reports from the Office of Institutions and Management and the Office of Human Capital Management.

Science

- NASA continues to take strong steps to implement Council recommendations and address issues.
- Discussion continued on preparation for the recently completed Workshop on Science Associated with the Lunar Exploration Architecture, the Tempe Conference. Review of recommendations resulting from that Workshop will be finalized at our April Meeting.

Space Operations

- Two big challenges in the space operations budget are transition from use of the Space Shuttle and its retirement and providing post-2010 ISS crew, spares and cargo transportation services.
- Another challenge is transitioning the highly skilled workforce to other productive activities, particularly at the Kennedy Space Center.
- The final two ISS contingency missions to launch spares are crucial to realizing the ISS research potential, especially in light of an extended gap in human spaceflight capability. The Committee suggests that NASA maintain reserves to execute these flights to protect the extensive national investment in ISS.
- The Committee found that the Shuttle transition, Orion/Ares development, and ISS utilization programs as outlined are highly dependent on flawless performance at every stage, with limited schedule flexibility to deal with unexpected situations.

If there are any questions or suggestions regarding these or other topics the Council should address in the upcoming year, please contact me.

Best Regards,



Harrison H. Schmitt
Chairman