

For thousands of years there has been one unattainable idea, a concept so absurd it was confined to the realms of fiction or reserved for religious deities. On July 13, 1969 this unthinkable ambition came to life with the launch of the mammoth Saturn 5 rocket. This feat eclipsed the Soviet Union's space dominance and came only after billions of dollars of investment.

For decades no project involved in space exploration would even come close to this astronomic sum of government spending. After decades of work, Congress approved the Artemis program aiming to send humans back to the moon. The program received rare, nearly unanimous support from scientists and congress. A passionate fan base included the hopes and dreams of thousands of scientists and a larger constellation of fans.

However, today the Artemis program is billions of dollars over budget, years delayed and under increasingly harsh criticism from what was initially its most vigorous cohort of support-space enthusiasts. But with the rocket under fire from all sides, commercial companies such as SpaceX have rapidly developed breakthrough competitors such as the Falcon 9 that could have taken government agencies like NASA well into the 2030s.

Why did such a fraught program receive such unconditional support? In the 1960s the human population experienced an exponential increase and an accompanying exponential proliferation of technology. In this climate optimism reached a climax, ironically at the height of the cold war.

That was the landscape when the Apollo mission was first conceived and it led to the unparalleled amount of resources injected into the program. Half a century later the world is a different place. Expansionism has not ended, but has transfigured into a different form. The commercial launch industry has already experienced a seismic shift. The Artemis program is reminiscent of a prior era of enormous industrial projects like the Apollo missions or the Space Shuttle which seemed to unite the public psyche and imagination. Flying high on the ambitions of thousands of workers and the taxpayer funds of hundreds of millions, riding explosions and flame, it seemingly defied physics.

Government spaceflight has felt like a collective dream of society. Private spaceflight has the feel that disguises itself as the former but is in actuality just the aspirations of a company acting in its own self interest.

The reason Artemise failed is not because it was designed poorly or came at the wrong time, it was poorly planned by policy makers who had little knowledge of space flight. But if we discard the problem and not the dream we might still be able to make it fly.

