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Public Awareness has Caused NASA’s Budget Cuts

As a twentieth century American anthropologist, Margret Mead once said, “We are at a point in history where a proper attention to space, and  
especially near space, may be absolutely crucial in bringing the world together” (Gwynn). However, NASA’s budget is at an all-time low and is being bombarded with critics that say we no longer need NASA, one of the reasons being because NASA takes too much of our tax dollars and much more. NASA has provided countless inspiring missions and technologies that have laid the way for future discoveries and technologies. NASA’s budget decreases are caused by the lack of public awareness.

NASA is an acronym for “National Aeronautics and Space Administration” and is funded and administered by the United States Government. NASA is responsible for our nation’s civilian space program as well as aerospace and aeronautics research. NASA was created by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1958 with a main focus on civilian space exploration rather than a military focused program. NASA was the United States first dedicated space program created in efforts to compete with Russia’s space program that had the first spacecraft, “Sputnik”, to orbit the earth (Layton).

After the landing of Apollo 11 on the Moon many people have been questioning what the need for NASA might be now. While NASA’s Moon landing in 1969 was one NASA’s greatest achievements, it is also one of our countries greatest achievements. The race to the Moon caused the citizens of the United States to band together and support NASA’s ambitions as a community. Landing on the Moon has inspired many people that if they put their mind to something they can achieve it. As an undocumented author of *Advances Since Apollo* published in US Today says, “There's no doubting the first sentiment. The moon landing was not only an extraordinary achievement; it was a magical moment in human history. Nearly all Americans alive at the time remember where they were when Armstrong spoke of "one giant leap for mankind””(Advances). Since that day in 1969, the spotlight on NASA has faded and many of their other great achievements have been overlooked and are almost invisible in academia. With people not being informed of NASA’s accomplishments it has made the public believe that NASA is a waste of taxpayer’s money.

NASA’s budget has been on a steady decline for years following the landing on the Moon. This decline has resulted in NASA having to cut many of their programs and plans for the future. In David Bell and Martin Parkers book *Space Travel & Culture: From Apollo to Space Tourism,* the authors state that, “For NASA, the Apollo shuttle was always a stepping-stone to the project upon which they really wanted to embark after Apollo, the space station”(Bell). The plan to build a space station on the moon is one example of the many programs NASA had to cut due to the decline in their budget. In the mid to late 1960’s, when support for NASA was great, NASA's budget was at an all-time high that rang in at 4.41% of the United Sates budget. NASA's budget began to decline after the near disaster of Apollo 13 causing NASA’s budget to drop to 1% range of the United States budget from 1970 to 1993 (Rogers). While our countries main source of aeronautics research only receiving 1% of our countries budget is pretty lame, it has surprisingly enough still continued to decline. NASA’s budget has now dropped below .5% of our nation’s budget. As one of our greatest presidents once said “With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed - Abraham Lincoln” (Public). With less awareness of NASA’s intentions and goals, the percentage of our budget that NASA receives will continue to decline .

With the success of private space programs such as SpaceX and Virgin Mobiles commercial space program, many people suggest that we should get rid of our governmentally funded NASA program and make way for private companies to take its place. These critics say that private entrepreneurs could continue what NASA is doing and even make it better. I believe that getting more people involved and interested in expanding our exploration of space is a great step forward but what many fail to realize is that the main goal for private organizations is profit. As Ben Bova a writer for Christian Science Monitor and the author of the article *NASA vs. Private Enterprise* says, “There are untold riches to be found in space; just unleash the profit motive and get government out of the way” (Bova). One of the greatest things that NASA has contributed to the United States and the rest of the world is the transparency and the sharing of the data they collect. If we privatize space exploration it would distract us from the shared goal of exploring the unknown and make the focus obtaining a profit.

We cannot afford to get rid of NASA in the perspective of scientific advancements for the future. The general public is often oblivious to the number of NASA’s achievements due to the fact they have been under publicized in our media and replaced with superficial news of celebrity affairs. When NASA was founded they had some pretty far out goals, which included: “expand human knowledge of space, lead the world in space-related technological innovation, develop vehicles that can carry both equipment and living organisms into space, and coordinate with international space agencies to achieve the greatest possible scientific advancements” (Layton). Contrary to popular belief NASA has completed all of these goals while gaining new knowledge of the unknowns in our galaxy.

Exploring the new frontier and space exploration might not be one of everyone’s main ambitions, however, it provides a new look on what is achievable and possible. During the race to the Moon it was not preached that science and engineering was beneficial for our country, it was perceived as common sense. As Neil DeGrasse Tyson, one of today’s greatest astrophysics states, “Epic space adventures plant seeds of economic growth, because doing what’s never been done before is intellectually seductive (whether deemed practical or not), and innovation follows, just as day follows night” (Past). The idea of space exploration needs to be more present in today’s culture. If this was the case, it would help inspire our younger generations to dream to be scientists, engineers, and technologists. Tyson continues to state “Their visions of tomorrow derive from their formal training as discoverers. And what inspired them was America’s bold and visible investment on the space frontier” (Past). With more publication on NASA our younger generation will grow up with knowing the fact that they can become what ever they set their minds too.

If more people could become more aware of the declining NASA budget, I think we would be able inspire people to dream big and allow NASA to continue to invent new technologies. We have only explored a grain of sand in a never ending desert. Just as the people reacted to the Apollo adventure, “They knew that seemingly impossible things were possible—the older among them had enabled, and the younger among them had witnessed the Apollo voyages to the Moon—the greatest adventure there ever was” (Past). However, there are more great adventures and new planets to explore. NASA only needs for people to have knowledge of the feats they are capable of achieving and the money will come naturally. Right now NASA takes one half of a penny from our taxes and for a penny we could double their budget (Past). NASA’s fate has been left up to us.

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