



RECENT FUNDING FOR NASA'S MARS PROJECT

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Last month, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation granted \$19.5 billion in funds to NASA for their future missions to Mars. According to PLNU Cosmos and Physics Professor, Christopher Gabler, space scientists and astro-organizations have been researching Mars and space exploration for over 50 years with the long-standing hope of landing feet-to-dust on our neighbor planet. Even smaller space

groups, like Elon Musk's SpaceX, hope to someday colonize Mars as a place to send the human race when our own planet Earth eventually fails.

"Scientists have been observing Mars for the last century," said Gabler. "And the hope of colonizing has been there since." According to Gabler, Mars, as compared to the other planets in our solar system, is the best candidate to support life. "In the early life of the planet, it is likely that it had more of an atmosphere," said Gabler. "Along with the presence of water, these factors could have made Mars support life, at least for a time."

With the latest scientific technology, Gabler believes that humans might be able to help Mars sustain life, but we have to get there first. Now, with the recent funding, it looks like NASA's goals of reaching Mars are no longer a hope for the distant future, but a reality for the present.

The Senate explained that the bipartisan bill is not for NASA's explorations alone. It is serving more as a financial map, requiring that NASA make an official goal to send crewed missions to Mars in the next 25 years. According to Francis French, director of education and space media for San Diego's Air and Space Museum, the bill is broken into three sections: \$4.5 billion for exploration, \$5 billion for space operations, and \$5.4 billion for science.

"Space funding gets cut really easily. A new president will come around and change the plan," said French. "Now, we are putting the funding in the hands of real scientists. We are letting NASA call the shots." French said that the Senate "gave the funding money to NASA as if to say, 'We're going to Mars. Stop messing with the plan.'" With NASA having control over their own project, the Mars missions have a far more promising future.

However, not everyone is on board with the latest Mars funding. PLNU's earth science professor, Dr. Heide Doss, conducted a survey in her earth science class where she asked her students whether the government should or should not be spending \$19.5 billion to fund NASA's Mars missions. 54 percent of the class said the government should fund Mars, expressing that, through explorations of space, humans could increase the quality of life here on earth, while also investing in a type of "Earth retirement plan." On the other side, 45 percent of Doss' class expressed that the funding for Mars was a mistake and that the government should be focusing their finances on how to better Earth, not desert it for another planet.

Student Dakota Hills said, “There is so much outside of our world that could be explored. Mars is a great place to start, especially if we can find a way to keep people living on the planet for long periods of time.” On the other hand, “We don’t have the proper funding with all the world chaos going on,” said student Kiana Fores. “Man shouldn’t go to Mars yet.”

Commenting on the controversy, French believes there needs to be a balance of both sides. “We need to make sure we are taking care of Earth while still looking beyond at a long-term investment,” said French. “We have so much technology and not to use it would be a waste.” Doss added, “I don’t know of anyone who wants to abandon our planet for another. Humankind did not abandon land when they learned to go to sea or to air. An adventurous spirit to explore and learn does not mean a desire to give up home.”

While most scientists agree that attention should be given equally to both bettering earth and exploring beyond our horizons, political scientists say that the \$19.5 billion is best spent on the Mars missions. “19.5 billion is not a lot of money at the end of the day,” said PLNU Political Science professor Rosco Williams. “It’s not going to do a lot for things like world hunger, so funding Mars is a good investment that gets our collective imagination going and can further spur education and science.”

PLNU Political Science Professor Lindsey Lupo added, “Our space exploration programs have tangible benefits for our own planet, including a better understanding of environmental sustainability efforts, the promotion of science education and medical advancements.” A trip to Mars may be the very thing that saves our planet, rather than abandoning it.

But there are concerns regarding Elon Musk’s endeavors to colonize Mars and whether or not it could cause conflict between nations. Does the United States have to right to claim a planet for their own? “Space competition has been a part of politics since the Cold War,” said Lupo. “But I’m not convinced that these current efforts would be any more or less antagonistic than earlier decades.” Williams adds, “Mars will most likely be treated as the moon or Antarctica—common heritages of man-kind. These are places that are shared by humanity. They don’t belong to anyone.”

French believes that there may even be a partnership between NASA, Elon Musk, and other countries to make the most of the Mars missions. “There is total harmony on the international space station despite the discourse on Earth,” said French. “It would be interesting to see a joint mission with Americans, Russians and Europeans.”

Though NASA is still in the research phase and astronauts are far from packing their bags, the recent Mars funding has gotten us one step closer to yet another giant step for human-kind. It started with the moon, now the world is ready for the next adventure. “We are pioneers and explorers at heart,” said Gabler. “This is about our very selves as adventurers. Not to do this would be a devolution of our character.”

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