

Re: the un-economics of space travel

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.space.policy/2005-02/0679.html>

From: Eric Chomko (*echomko_at__at_polaris.umuc.edu*)

Date: 02/04/05

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Nathan Gant (NGANT17@peoplepc.com) wrote:

: Eric, you're a smart guy, and I am reasonably confident that you don't have
: \$20M in loose-change in your pocket to go on a space joy-ride, and I hope
: you don't waste your time working inside some pointless NASA beauracracy.

You're only half right with the sentence above.

: Even that N'Sync kid couldn't cough up that kind of dough, for all the
: hoopla that it generated.

I thought Radio Shack was going to spring for the publicity?

: I suppose that one of the mistakes you're making, it's to associate the
: exploration of space with the exploration of earth. Columbus used free
: energy (old-fashioned wind technology and sail-power) to 'discover' the New
: World ('discovery', as in a narrow-minded West European perspective, the
: native peoples of Turtle Island never 'discovered' themselves, of course).

Well, the two cultures hadn't met until that discovery, so the argument
could be one of semantics.

: The point is that wind and sails cost Columbus nothing in terms of the
: energy being harnessed, although it must be noted that the Spanish monarchy
: financed the trip – built the ships, loaned him the money for the manpower
: and provisions, ect.

Yes, Columbus was a contractor and the Spanish monarchy, Queen Isabela and
King Ferdinand, was the customer. An aside, what was their most famous
event in history if not funding Columbus's voyage?

: Now in space, we're looking at a whole different ball game here. The
: escape-velocity to get into space, or rather, the work required to move a
: body from the surface of the earth to infinity is about 6.0×10^7 J/kg
: which can be translated into about 25,000 mph. A standard physics equation
: which I'm sure you already know.

Yes, I am aware of escape velocity.

: Obviously, you don't build these kinds of ships out of wood, your
: life–support systems are very exact and demanding, and even more to the
: point, the government which finances your jaunt into this 'new world' must
: have a reasonable expectation of a ROI (return on investment).

Government? ROI? NO! You see if you let THAT proliferate, then you have socialism and eventually communism in the form of a single corporation, the Government. They can simply declare competition illegal, and then the barrier to entry is eminent. Communism doesn't work and you can't take it for granted it will never take root without checking yourself, which you did not. Are you a commie? No. Could a series of bad moves through a few generations make us communist? Yes, we have seen it happen.

ROI in monetary terms should NEVER be a government goal. This is the main reason that the Internet was turned over to the private sector (thanks, Al Gore) and not kept within the government from where it originated.

ROI in terms of having an DARPA project become a new industry in the private sector is fine just as long as the government's role is not to make money.

: If it
: doesn't, it is quickly going bankrupt, because it's a million–times more
: expensive, and you better make a million–times more money if you even want
: to break even. Well, we could have at least tried to bring back a ton or
: two of titanium dioxide for all our trouble on the moon. Just some random
: samples of moon dust? The Russian/Soviet robot probes had already been
: there and done that, if my Soviet space history is correct. But we could
: have brought back some other precious metal, element, mineral or whatever.

There is nothing up there worth bringing back from a mining standpoint that is profitable.

: When the creditors are getting impatient, you can try to hold them off with
: something materialistic like that. Song and dance routines don't cut it, my
: friend. It won't pay the rent.

: Pres. Kennedy and his wise advisors no doubt went through some of this
: rationale back in 1963, and his answer was an Apollo Programme which was a
: cooperative mission with the rest of the world. A joint manned moon
: mission with the Soviet Union, to be specific. His important point, in his
: final address to the world at the United Nations building in Oct. 1963, it
: was that no one nation should ever bear the exorbitant costs of space
: exploration. Sadly, NASA didn't have the intelligence to comprehend his
: vision back then, and it is doubtful if they ever will have the intelligence
: today. Which is why I would discourage you from working with them.

Well, we did have Apollo–Soyuz and the ISS is a joint mission. Is there still room for more cooperation? Yes.

: But even worse, Kennedy's death has resulted in a much more inauspicious
: situation for the world, because currently no one is able to seriously talk
: about joint space missions anymore. Definitely not Bush, who wants to make
: money on war instead of peace. Russia and China will conduct joint-military
: maneuvers soon. Because of the war-hawk in the White House. The world is
: getting fed up with Bush's policies of terrorism and mindless destruction in
: the world.

I'm no Bush fan, nor am I for making the DOD a huge social program, as it
appears to be for the GOP. But I do support NASA as it's roots were and
are to be a non military agency for the peaceful exploration of space. The
missions to Mars and Saturn are nothing less that spectacular IMO.

: Not only that, going back to the issue, there is evidence that suggests that
: NASA had more to immediately gain from his assassination in Dallas that
: fateful year. It is very likely JFK would not have signed off on NASA's
: appropriations budget in Dec. 1963, due to NASA's hard-headed and irrational
: intransigency towards the joint lunar mission with the Soviets. All this is
: documented in the history books, if you care to look at it. I posted one of
: the appropriate links here in an earlier message.

Sounds like you got a hold of the Torbitt Document. Well, all I have to
say to that is caveat lector.

Eric

: "Eric Chomko" <echomko_at_@polaris.umuc.edu> wrote in message
: news:ctusm6\$29kc\$2@news.ums.edu...
: > Nathan Gant (NGANT17@peoplepc.com) wrote:
: > : You can't go, Eric. As you don't have the money, i.e., you're not a
: > : multi-millionaire, but even if you were, you probably are not going to
: > : waste
: > : \$20M bucks for a tourist ride into outer space.
: >
: > So what? I can and do still participate in space. Space
: > tourism may actually be akin to traveling around the world
: > today. As expensive as that is, I can afford it. Haven't done
: > it yet, but it is on my list.
: >
: > : Once the public realizes that they're getting ripped-off by NASA, all
: > : this
: > : crap about "prestige" and hi-tech advances and other BS, it will be
: > : exposed
: > : for what it is and we can put these worthless space scientists to do
: > : real
: > : work, like washing dishes and digging ditches for a living. On Earth,
: > : of
: > : course.
: >
: > No, space is an industry that has NASA as the largest but
: > not the only customer. Other govt. agencies (i.e. NOAA,

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:> DOD) go into space. Other countries have space agencies.
:> Corporations use comsats, and eventually a commercial market
:> open to the public will exist.
:>
:> What do you think about war, the DOD and money? Not
:> wasteful like you see NASA?
:>
:> Here, you get into the cleaning industry and I'll stick with
:> space. Deal?
:>
:> Eric
:>
:> : "Eric Chomko" <echomko_at_@polaris.umuc.edu> wrote in message
:> : news:ctu0eu\$19gg\$5@news.ums.edu...
:> :> Nathan Gant (NGANT17@peoplepc.com) wrote:
:> :> : there isn't much debate that the economics of space travel are
:> : marginal
:> : at
:> :> : best. If the moon were awash in oil, bringing it to Earth would be
:> :> : uneconomical -- the same goes for gold, diamonds and every other
:> : natural
:> :> : resource. Agriculture and manufacturing are even less viable in
:> : space
:> : (the
:> :> : nonsense that was sold to a gullible public about crystals growing
:> : at
:> : the
:> :> : International Space Station remains nonsense).
:> :>
:> :>
:> :>
:> :> We go to space because it is there. And since it will continue to be
:> : there
:> :> we will continue to go. It is really quite simple.
:> :>
:> :> Eric
:>
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