

Congressional Meddle of Dishonor

Contributed by Jeff Krukin
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The Congressional Medal of Honor is our nation's highest award for valor during combat. Citations given with the award typically include language such as "... conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty."

Unfortunately, when it comes to making the hard decisions required to develop efficient, effective, and affordable space transportation, some members of Congress demonstrate a total lack of courage and bravery when under fire from their constituents to save their jobs. Instead, they would rather meddle in the affairs of an emerging industry that they see only as a threat to their districts.

I previously wrote about Alabama Sen. Shelby's efforts to maintain the tradition of spending tax dollars to save jobs, regardless of the long-term cost to the national interest. The trend continues elsewhere on the Hill.

Once the Review of U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee, headed by former Lockheed Martin Corp. Chairman Norman Augustine, recommended that "... that NASA shelve its goal of rapidly returning to the moon and instead focus on nurturing a robust commercial space industry that can handle short-term objectives of the nation's space program, such as ferrying cargo and crew to the international space station," defenders of the OldSpace faith leaped into action.

A December 2nd hearing was held with the little-disguised goal of finding some way to prevent NASA's Ares 1 from being replaced with vehicles produced, owned, and flown by the NewSpace industry. With the highly-capable Brett Alexander of the Commercial Spaceflight Federation as the sole representative of the NewSpace industry, the results were as easy to predict as ice on a space shuttle. If nothing else, were eyebrows not raised at the fact that Rep. Gabrielle Giffords (D-Arizona), chairwoman of the House Science and Technology space and aeronautics subcommittee, is married to a NASA astronaut? Sounds like insider trading to me.

Even worse was Giffords' assertion that private industry should not compete with the Constellation program. I guess she was sick on the day that her college Civics 101 class addressed this issue, or she would have realized that she has that backwards. To wit:

In the process of governing, the Government should not compete with its citizens. The competitive enterprise system, characterized by individual freedom and initiative, is the primary source of national economic strength. In recognition of this principle, it has been and continues to be the general policy of the Government to rely on commercial sources to supply the products and services the Government needs. Circular No. A-76, Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget (Revised 1999)

And yet, on the very next day, came a bolt from the OldSpace blue, the Director of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. During a talk at a Space Transportation Association breakfast, Robert Lightfoot said, "If we can get the commercial operators to get to low Earth orbit, get that access in space, then NASA can focus on getting out of low Earth orbit. Our goal is to enable them, not fight them." Sen. Shelby, are you listening? Rep. Giffords, can you hear that when your husband isn't whispering sweet astronaut-nothings in your ear? And Rep. Parker Griffith, whose district includes the Center, did you forget this when you supported a House appropriations bill that would prevent, in your words, "any efforts by NASA to cancel or change the current Constellation program without first seeking approval of Congress?"

Finally, in the "saying the right thing and not realizing it" category, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-California) said this when asked about more funding for NASA: "Everything is in competition for the dollar, and a judgment will be made as to what it does in terms of job creation." The key word here is "creation," as in creation of new jobs, as opposed to the desire of Sen. Shelby and Rep. Giffords to save old jobs. Unfortunately, I expect Rep. Pelosi is thinking in the traditional sense of saving taxpayer funded jobs and has no comprehension of the job-creating capability of the NewSpace industry.

I truly understand that Senators and Representatives are expected to work for their constituents, but when doing so to the detriment of the nation that they serve, at what point does this become disingenious? When will you cease to earn the Meddle of Dishonor and demonstrate the bravery and courage required for a Medal of Honor?