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Scientists: Scrapping Space Programs Short-Sighted

The debate is heating up between space scientists and political analysts over whether funding should be cut for space exploration.

The news comes in the wake of a *Washington Times* report that Obama administration plans to slash [NASA's](#) budget.

A group of scientists gathered on Capitol Hill, Thursday, to discuss the long-term effects of the loss of NASA's most prominent space programs.

Jim Bell, president of [The Planetary Society](#), noted the space program has taken mankind close to Mars, Venus, Jupiter and Saturn.

"The risk is that we'll lose all this momentum that we have in understanding the worlds around us," Bell, who attended Thursday's forum, told CBN News.

After discovering more than a thousand other solar systems, the Kepler telescope will be turned off before it might find Earth-like planets that could support life.

The Webb telescope, five times more powerful than Hubble, will likely never launch.

"Hubble discovered a new law of physics: the acceleration of the expansion of the universe. That implies there's something out there we don't know about," Dr. Robert Zubrin, president of [The Mars Society](#) and author of the book [The Case for Mars](#), told CBN News.

"We might be able to get to the bottom of it with the Webb. We need to stay on this quest," he said.

Drain on Taxpayers?

Gene Healy, vice president of the libertarian Cato Institute, disagrees. He says taxpayers shouldn't have to pay one more penny for such quests.

"We've got a national debt that's larger than the entire U.S. economy, and this is a vanity project we can't afford," he stated.

"We're entering an era of austerity and we've got to make cuts," Healy added. "This happens to be a program that a significant majority of taxpayers are willing to cut."

But Zubrin called the likely cuts an offense against science and civilization.

"These are the most effective programs in NASA," he told CBN News. "They're the ones that really deliver the goods."

"These are epic achievements in humanity's search for truth," he added.

Stopping the flow of robot-scouts dooms America's plan to send man to Mars.

"All the work that the robotic programs do is laying the groundwork for eventually sending people out into the solar system," Bell said.

Zuprin agreed, saying "If the scouts don't go, the army won't follow."

Long-Term Implications

Could such a budget decision someday doom the human species?

"The earth is constantly at risk for impacts or major shifts in climate or nuclear war or whatever, our species is at risk. And so we would in fact hedge our bets by getting some of our species off the planet," Bell said.

These pro-space exploration scientists say that while space programs may seem like a luxury, there've yielded tangible technological rewards, like the development of GPS satellites and others.

"Astronomy has led to the major breakthroughs in physics: the laws of gravitation through nuclear fusion," Zuprin said.

"By sending rovers to Mars, by flying around the rings of Saturn, we inspire kids to think about science, math and technology and engineering," Bell explained. " And we educate people. We're rewriting the textbooks right now."

Healy, however, doesn't believe it's worth enough to drain taxpayer dollars.

"If you feel the music of the spheres and you're captivated by the romance of space flight, then pony up," he said. "Don't ask the embattled taxpayer to pay for what polls show they think is another bridge to nowhere."

"I think a formerly space-faring nation is a formerly great nation," Zuprin shot back.