

Former NASA Astronauts and Apollo Veterans Blast Shuttle Shutdown

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A letter sent June 30 by the former Director of NASA Manned Spaceflight in Houston points up the fact that Barack Obama's (and his predecessors') cancellation of the shuttle program, with no replacement, will not only kill the future, but could be a death sentence for the astronauts in the International Space Station.

In a letter sent to NASA administrator Charles Bolden, Barack Obama, Joe Biden, and the heads of the Senate and House committees responsible for NASA, former Director Christopher Kraft blasted the Obama Administration for endangering the lives of astronauts by its shutdown of the shuttle program. As of now, the **last** shuttle flight is scheduled for July 8--and the rest of the fleet is being decommissioned and sent to museums around the country.

Kraft's letter has been endorsed by Shuttle Commanders Robert Crippen and Frederick Hauck, Apollo astronauts Walter Cunningham, Neil Armstrong, James Lovell, and Eugene Cernan, and NASA officials Gene Kranz, Tom Moser and John Robinson.

Kraft begins by laying out the dangers of killing the shuttle:

"We believe that the planned retirement of the Space Shuttle fleet after the flight of STS-135 next month will create an unacceptable flight risk for maintaining safe and reliable operations of the International Space Station (ISS). As you well know, the shuttles are the only spacecraft that can provide independent spacewalks for critical ISS repairs.

"If an incident or life support failure rendered the ISS uninhabitable, repair spacewalks to restore operations would not be possible from the space station. In a worst case scenario, deterioration and loss of systems on an abandoned ISS could result in an uncontrolled, catastrophic reentry with risks to populated areas around the world."

The letter requests emergency action to avoid this risk:

- * Congress should have an immediate three-week study and hold emergency hearings.

- * In the hearings, Congress should consider passing emergency legislation to keep all the shuttle fleet, and facilities to service it, flightworthy.

- * NASA and ISS partners should consider funding options.

- * Congress, NASA and ISS should evaluate the option of postponing the final launch until more external fuel tanks and other parts can be built.