

## Reaching new heights

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### Photo from the Space X Facebook page

**Prince Frederick, MD** - Last November a very special anniversary was marked. The United States celebrated 60 years of space exploration. The vision of the entity that came to be known as NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) has been to “reach new heights and reveal the unknown so that what we do and learn will benefit mankind.” The agency’s revised mission statement currently reads “to pioneer the future in space exploration, scientific discovery and aeronautics research.” Much has been made about the fact that the word “Earth” is no longer in the mission statement.

The adventure began with President Eisenhower approving a plan to put a satellite into space. Subsequently, the human element—people traveling into space—got the attention and focus of the public. A few days after the 1961 sub-orbital flight by Mercury astronaut Alan Shepard, President Kennedy proclaimed that the U.S. should commit to a goal of men reaching the moon and returning safely to Earth. In recalling those early days when the U.S. was noticeably lagging behind the Soviet Union in the space race, it seems remarkable to think that next summer (2019) the 50th anniversary of the first landing on the moon will be marked.

Along the way there have been spectacular successes and sobering, tragic failures. The U.S. space program is the quintessential “trial and error” endeavor for our nation.

While some cynics may believe that the trillions spent over 60 years could have been put to better use, it should be pointed out that NASA—an independent agency of the Executive Branch of the U.S. Government—has never been above 5 percent annually of the U.S.’s spending.

This past week we saw evidence that the vision of reaching new heights is not waning. The enthusiasm Americans have shown for the launch of Space X’s Falcon Heavy rocket demonstrates that our collective ingenuity can push us forward. Thousands cheered at Kennedy Space Center in Florida when Falcon Heavy was launched. Approximately 3 million viewed the live stream and millions more have watched the replay. Space X owner Elon Musk called the landing of the rocket’s two boosters the “most exciting thing ever seen.”

The ongoing exploration of space is something all humans can and should appreciate. It’s larger than any of us and could continue for several generations. It shows us both our relative insignificance and our extraordinary greatness. We can’t wait for the next “most exciting thing ever seen.”

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