



Free Press Viewpoint

Scrapping moon trashes space effort

President Barack Obama announced his plan for the future of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration on Thursday, and while there are many good ideas there – and a few billion more in the budget – there’s a big chunk cut out that we’re going to miss.

The news was out for a while before the announcement. The president is scrapping the Constellation program, which was developing a new capsule and rocket to take us back to the Moon. His reasoning was that there is a lot more space to explore without the expense of retracing our steps.

“We’ve been there before,” he said. A letter was sent to the president signed by many of the Apollo astronauts, including Neil Armstrong and Jim Lovell, that criticized the new plan. When the first man to walk on the Moon doesn’t like your space plan, just how far from the pack have you strayed?

He’s right in part though, there’s a lot of space out there to explore, but he failed to realize the real disappointment of the moon landings, which is that we never capitalized on them. The Apollo program was a monumental human effort. We had huge leaps forward in technology and understanding in the space of a decade and then we did nothing more with it.

We never used the capability we had worked so hard to get. Think about it, in the history of mankind only 12 people have walked on the moon and we’ve had the capability to get there for 40 years.

Shortsightedness in Washington in the 1970s ruined our best chance for more manned Moon missions. Three Apollo missions got cancelled and the public lost interest. We confined ourselves to near-Earth-orbit missions. Then we replaced our capsules with space shuttles, which are only capable of missions in orbit.

If we had kept with it, think what we could have by now. There could have been whole cities on the Moon by now for all we know. It’s a lot easier to continue a thing than to start it back up again after 40 years in mothballs.

We should do now what we should have done in the first place, we should go back to the Moon and we should stay. We have better technology now. Our laptop computers have more computing power than the Apollo capsule. We have better, safer and more powerful rockets, better building materials and a lot more experience with low-gravity environments and prolonged stays in space. It would not be so dangerous today.

We have the capability to build stations and colonies on the Moon and we should do so. Think what we could learn if scientists had years on the Moon rather than a few hours. The Moon could also become a staging area for so much more. One of the big difficulties in reaching Mars is the power required to get a ship capable of reaching our planetary neighbor into orbit. What if we built it on the Moon? Getting it underway would be child’s play.

The President said his plan would result in more missions to more destinations for less money. But are we going in the right direction? Sometimes retracing your steps is the way to get to the next path. —Kevin Bottrell



Photo courtesy of NASA

Soundtrack helps life flow

I really believe music at its best is the soundtrack of our lives.

Some musicians have a gift for finding the perfect way to describe complex emotions. No matter what my mood is during the day, I always have a few specific songs I can listen to that reflect that emotion. What music I’m drawn to has always been based on lyrical content. I have always been drawn to musicians who are able to come up with a few words that perfectly capture the mood of the world or the complex and often incoherent personality traits of human beings.

I admit I’m one of those people who wishes he was alive in the late 60’s and early 70’s when Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, Arlo Guthrie, the Grateful Dead, Johnny Cash, Creedence Clearwater Revival, the Eagles, Bob Seger, Jimmy Buffett and James Taylor were in the prime of their careers. These artists have been like old friends to me. Whenever the world gets me down, I find solace in the songs written by these people.

Whenever I feel like my goals are always going to a little out of my reach, I listen to “Slip, Slidin’ Away,” by Simon because it perfectly defines the way I’m was feeling during these moments.

In the song’s chorus Simon sings: “Slip, slidin’ away, slip slidin’ away, You know the nearer your destination the more you’re slip, slidin’ away.”

I think a lot of people I know can identify with these lyrics. Sometimes when I have rid



Andy Heintz

• Wildcat Ramblings

myself of past demons and I’m just a few steps away from reaching my goals, they spring up out of nowhere and knock me back to the starting line.

My favorite lyrics in “Slip, Slidin’ Away,” is when Simon sings about a woman he knew. He sings:

“I know a woman, became a wife. These are the very words she uses to describe her life.

She said a good day ain’t got no rain, She said a bad day is when I sit in bed, And think of things that might have been.”

I feel like I understand this woman because I always wonder what my life would have been like if certain things that happened in my past had turned out differently.

During times when I’m in a good mood and all seems right with the world I listen to “Box of Rain,” by the Grateful Dead.

There are two parts in this song that I’ve always loved.

In the first part, the band sings: “Maybe you’ll find direction around some corner,

Where it’s been waiting to meet you –

What do you want me to do, to watch for you while your sleeping? Well pleased don’t be surprised if you find me dreaming too.”

The lyrics are naive and utopian, but they have always put a smile on my face because they reflect the innocent, friendly side of human beings that is so easily crushed by the cruelties of everyday living.

In the second part of the song I like, the band sings:

“A box of rain will ease the pain, And love will see you through.” I always find myself thinking how great it would be if life was as simple as that lyric.

I have tried and often failed to live my life based on the chorus of the song “That’s what Living is to me,” by Jimmy Buffett.

In the song, Buffett sings: “Be good and you will be lonesome, Be lonesome and you will be free, Live a lie and you will live to regret it, That’s what living is to me.”

These lyrics hold a lot of wisdom for anyone that has to decide whether to go along with what’s popular or choose to do what they think is right.

Music is so good at helping people get through the painful process we call living. It has always helped me cope when life becomes too confusing.

Andy Heintz, a K-State journalism graduate, is sports reporter for the Colby Free Press. He says he loves K-State athletics and fishing, sports and opinion writing.

Education is taking time to learn

The financial crisis for Kansas education is causing some big schools to drop “block scheduling” and some small rural schools to move to a four-day school week. One of these is a good idea academically. The other is bad.

“Block scheduling” is an education “reform” that came to many Kansas high schools in the early 1990s. Instead of each class meeting each day, students attended classes every other day for two-period blocks.

Some teachers appreciated the longer time for lab work or theater practice, but the system was intended to force supposedly old-fashioned teachers to get away from lecturing. A double period was just too long for a teacher to talk, and this would supposedly force more cooperative learning and other group learning. And it was supposed to save the beginning-of-class housekeeping that would occur only two or three times a week, not every day.

But, according to research by Kansas teacher Timothy Johnson, who surveyed Kansas educators’ actual use of block periods in the midst of its popularity a decade ago, “only 27.1 percent of teachers agreed that student motivation increased and only 37.5 percent of teachers felt students became more responsible for learning.”

And science teachers did not agree (only 16.7 percent) with block schedule advocates that it increased opportunities to team teach or spend more time with colleagues. A solid majority of teachers (68.7 percent) disagreed with the statement, “I complete more units of instruction.”

Today, mathematics and language teachers can tell you that students in schools with block scheduling fall behind nearly a month per year. The reason is simple: It takes time to learn.



John Richard Schrock

• Education Frontlines

Daily reinforcement is valuable.

Math and foreign language rely on everyday practice to nibble a slightly bigger problem or vocabulary, practice it, check it, and then nibble a little more. Block scheduling requires the student to take two bites at once every other day. It doesn’t work as well.

Students need “incubation time” for concepts to sink in. Teachers need to correct the math or refine the accent and vocabulary each day. Students cannot run at double speed and bridge the missing days for these lock-step skills that build.

Schools that move back to old-fashioned classes every day to save money will also see their student’s performance rise, other factors kept equal.

However, some small rural Kansas schools under financial stress are considering moving to a four-day week. By lengthening the school day Monday through Thursday, the school can shut down the building on Friday. This saves heating and air conditioning and some bus costs. It does not save salaries, and that is the big expense.

The four-day school week is not new. Some rural western Kansas schools have been on a four-day schedule for years. Those administrators and teachers will tell you that the students do not learn as much. It is the same problem

as block-scheduling: the gap across the longer weekend means more forgetting time.

It is too long a break from the daily progress made by study and practice each day. Like the big “fall-back” in learning that occurs each summer, the four-day week is a series of little “fall-backs” each long weekend.

It just takes time to learn.

John Richard Schrock, a professor of biology and department chair at a leading teacher’s college, lives in Emporia. He emphasizes that his opinions are strictly his own.



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Mallard Fillmore

• Bruce Tinsley



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