



Free Press Viewpoint

Fifty years later, space race crawling

It seems strange to be celebrating the 50th anniversary of the first American to orbit the Earth at a time when we'd be lucky to have any Americans in space.

Feb. 20, 1962, John Glenn blasted off in a Mercury capsule, Friendship 7, made three orbits of the Earth and came back down safely. While he was not the first person in space, it was still a significant step for a nation just finding its space legs.

Glenn and his backup pilot, Scott Carpenter, are the only surviving Mercury astronauts. Al Shepard died of leukemia in 1998, Gus Grissom in the Apollo 1 fire in 1967, Wally Schirra of a heart attack in 2007, Gordo Cooper of Parkinson's disease in 2004 and Deke Slayton, chosen as one of the Mercury Seven but grounded by a heart condition, of a brain tumor in 1993.

Glenn told CBS on Friday that the U.S. will regret taking too long to develop a new spacecraft, going on to say the country shouldn't have retired the shuttles without a replacement.

Last week, the administration announced a \$17 billion NASA budget; \$830 million would go to private spaceflight development – about twice what Congress allowed last year; \$628 million to the Webb Space Telescope – an increase; and \$2.4 billion to Earth and solar science missions – a slight increase.

However, that means NASA will be backing out of Exo-Mars, a multi-spacecraft robotic expedition to Mars planned for 2016 and 2018.

At least there is \$1 billion going to the Orion program, the next generation of American manned spacecraft. This platform is in some ways a step backwards. Although it's being billed as a way to eventually get to Mars or nearby asteroids, it is a return to the capsule-style spacecraft of the 1960s and '70s.

That program is a drastically scaled down version of Constellation, which would include a lunar lander. The Bush Administration estimated it would cost \$230 billion. It's hard to see how Obama expects Orion to advance on \$1 billion a year.

Lack of commitment to space exploration isn't limited to the Democratic administration. Presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich has taken a lot of flack for suggesting that the U.S. could have a colony on the moon by 2020. Pundits, Democrats and his primary opponents jumped all over him, but what's wrong with that besides cost? This is something we should have done in the 1970s, but lacked the political will.

However, the thing we need more than a moon colony is an orbital shipyard. To make it to Mars, and to make it exponentially easier to have routine travel to the moon and back, we need dedicated space ships. Capsules are fine for something that has to escape from Earth's gravity, but we need real ships built specifically to travel in space and never land. We can attach reusable landers, but the main ship would simply sail back and forth between the planets, and the best way to build it would be in orbit.

The best thing about the modern space age is international cooperation. Between America, Russia and the European Space Agency, this is something we can accomplish.

The thing that inhibits any ambition in space exploration is money. No one in the political arena today has the will to say "we will do this, no matter the cost."

Yes, we have pressing problems here at home, but we can't lose sight of where we need to go. Human history is one of exploration, of going over the horizon in order to understand more about the universe in which we live. We must not back down from that tradition.

No doubt, John Glenn would agree. —*Kevin Bottrell*

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Colby, Kan. 67701 fax (785) 462-7749

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Sharon Friedlander - Publisher
sfriedlander@nwkansas.com

NEWS

News Editor

colby.editor@nwkansas.com

Kayla Cornett - Sports Reporter
colby.sports@nwkansas.com

Marian Ballard - Copy Editor
mballard@nwkansas.com

Christina Beringer - Society Reporter
colby.society@nwkansas.com

ADVERTISING

colby.ads@nwkansas.com

Kathryn Ballard

Advertising Representative
kballard@nwkansas.com

Kylee Hunter - Graphic Design
khunter@nwkansas.com

BUSINESS OFFICE

Kylie Freeman - Office Manager
kfreeman@nwkansas.com

Evan Barnum - Systems Administrator
support@nwkansas.com

NOR'WEST PRESS

Richard Westfahl - General Manager

Jim Jackson, Jim Bowker, Gary Meyer, Pressmen

Lana Westfahl, Judy McKnight, Kris McCool, Stacy Brashear, Tracy Traxel, Mailing

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Signs of spring show in garden, baseball

The green shoots were unmistakable from the second-floor bedroom, though I hadn't been expecting them.

The daffodils always poke their little heads out of the ground in mid-February, and they always surprise me.

It's still winter, after all, and it's usually cold outside. Makes no difference whether the groundhog or woodchuck or whatever saw his shadow, February hews to winter.

Except, of course, for the daffodils and that other harbinger of spring, baseball. For spring training kicks off at mid-February each year as pitchers and catchers report for duty.

That both would come the same day – Friday – is no surprise. What's surprising is that we're so mired in winter by the time that February rolls around that we can't see it's nearly over.

Nearly over doesn't mean we've seen the last of winter weather, especially in this country. We often see more snow from spring storms driven by big lows that sweep across the nation in February, March and even April



Steve Haynes

- Along the Sappa

than we do in the dead of winter. January can be dry and sunny here.

But March. March can be a bad time to be on the road. This year, however, it's warm enough, I suspect we may get more rain than ice.

Spring is a time of eternal optimism. The days get longer, and Daylight Saving Time makes them seem longer yet. All baseball teams start out even, and managers talk about how much better they'll be this year, even in Pittsburgh and Kansas City. Especially our own Rockies.

Outdoors, the grass will start to green up and those first tender shoots will yield to bright yellow

low blooms in the yard. They'll be followed by crocuses, and eventually, by May, the irises.

Green grass will lead to green shrubs, and eventually, but not till late April, green trees. The cedars will turn from red to green again. We'll have to start mowing, but first there are flower beds to rake and leaves to pick up.

It'll be time to drag out the hoses and water the grass before you know it.

Not this week, though. Right now, it's still winter. But there'll be baseball games on the radio by Saturday. And hope in the air. We know now we can survive a few more days of cold, a few more storms, a few more icy blasts. Because we know it's almost over.

And spring brings the promise of renewal, of baseball, of summer days.

But for now, it is still basketball season. And we've got a few weeks before blizzards yield to thunderstorms and tornadoes.

Steve Haynes is president of Nor'West Newspapers. When he has the time, he'd rather be reading a good book or casting a fly.

House looks at workers compensation

The pace of business in the Kansas House of Representatives saw another noticeable uptick last week as we debated 25 bills in anticipation of our first major session deadline. Committees are doing a great job of sending bills to the full House for further consideration and I expect we will have a substantial workload this week.

Workers Compensation (HB 2531)

HB 2531 creates a seven-member Workers Compensation and Employment Security Boards Nominating Committee to replace the current Administrative Law Judge Nominating and Review Committee and the Workers Compensation Board Nominating Committee. The governor would have the responsibility of appointing all seven members of the committee but members are required to be representatives of the following groups and officials: Secretary of Labor; Kansas Chamber of Commerce; National Federation of Independent Business; Kansas AFL-CIO; Society for Human Resource Management; Kansas Self-Insurers Association; and a representative from an employee organization or professional employee organization.

Meetings would be on an as-needed basis to provide nominees for appointments to the position of workers compensation administrative law judge or board members and employment security board of review. No committee action would take effect without the approval of two-thirds of the committee.



Rick Billinger

- This week in Topeka

thirds of the committee.

Kansas Water Policy Reform (SB 272 and HB 2516)

Impacting many communities in the western half of the state, Kansas's water policy has become one of the main focuses of the 2012 legislative session and the executive branch priorities. Accordingly, the House has considered and will continue to work on a number of changes to existing water law to help sustain one of our most precious and declining resources. Without careful planning, we risk endangering the livelihood, and ultimately the economic stability, of Kansas' agricultural economy.

This week the House took up two pieces of legislation designed to improve state water policy. SB 272 allows for multi-year flex accounts to assist irrigators, landowners and other affected parties in periods of drought. This would give parties flexibility in using their water allocation over a five-year period. Years where individuals use more water than

allocated can be set off by other years where the full allocation is not used.

HB 2516 extends the availability and permanency of the Water Bank Act. In the late 1990s, the Legislature passed the Water Bank Act allowing for two water banks in the state. A person with water rights can deposit a portion of their usage rights into the water bank for purchase. Currently, there is only one bank operating in central Kansas and it has not been put to great use. However, the potential for fracking in Kansas makes this a useful tool in ensuring oil producers have the water they need for the fracking procedures.

I will be at some Town Hall meetings on Saturday, March 3, following are the locations and times.

- 8 a.m., Plainville Hospital Care.
- 9:45 a.m., Schweitzer Hotel, Hill City.
- 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Hoxie Elks Lodge.
- 1:50 to 2:45 p.m., Colby Community College.

Please come out with any questions you may have.

Thank you for the honor of serving you.

Rick Billinger is the state representative from the 121st District. He currently serves on the Commerce and Economic Development, Education Funding, Insurance and Local Government committees.

Where to write, call

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. roberts.senate.gov/public/

U.S. Sen. Jerry Moran, 354 Russell Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510 (202) 228-6966. Fax (202) 225-5124 moran.senate.gov/public/

State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, 300 SW10th St., Room 225-E., Topeka, Kan. 66612, (785) 296-7399 ralph.ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us

State Rep. Rick Billinger, Docking Building, Room 754, Topeka Kan., 66612, (785) 296-7659 rick.billinger@house.ks.gov

Mallard Fillmore

- Bruce Tinsley

