

NASA Travels Into the Great Unknown

With Atlantis' final mission complete, the future of U.S. space exploration seems uncertain. What do you think the future holds for NASA and the U.S. space program?

PRACTICAL SCIENCE WITH PHIL FREDA

Last Thursday, the final flight of the space shuttle Atlantis safely returned to Earth after a rendezvous with the International Space Station, ending NASA's longest running spaceflight program.

According to an article published on Haaretz.com, the decision to cease the shuttle program came down to money.

In addition to nixing the program, 1,510 skilled employees, including engineers and scientists, have been laid off.

According to an article on Voice of America, the ending of the program also leaves the U.S. with no means of putting astronauts into space unless we feel like paying Russia \$50-million per ride.

It's an understandable decision with the economy being in somewhat of a trench, but I feel that the implications of the shuttle program's cancelation are more than just another cut-back.

Personally, I feel that we, as a country, have lost something truly special that [defines us as a nation](#).

NASA expects private industries to take the torch and control future astronaut transport to the International Space Station. It just seems that in relying on private corporations cheapens the image of an American space program.

According to recent news reports, President Obama's future plans may point to exploring an asteroid on or around the year of 2025 and then a possible mission to Mars somewhere in the 2030s.

These plans are not anywhere near concrete, however.

[NASA](#) states on their website that:

"The end of the space shuttle program does not mean the end of NASA, or even of NASA sending humans into space."

I hope that is the case, but the future of U.S. space exploration seems a bit hazy nonetheless.

I feel space exploration is an integral part of our future as a species.

I am writing this not to make a statement, but to hopefully gather feedback from the readers.

- How does the decision to cease the shuttle program make you feel?
- What do you believe the future holds for U.S. space exploration?
- Do you feel that NASA and the U.S. government have made a smart decision?

- What are some of your fondest memories of NASA and the shuttle programs?

I would really love to hear what Patch readers say have to say on this topic.

You can either e-mail me at philip.freda@gmail.com or post your answers in the comment's section. I am eager to hear your responses.

And, remember, space is the final frontier.