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## Editorial

### Wanted: A vision for aeronautics

When President Bush announced his Vision for Space Exploration on January 14, 2004, it was received with great excitement in many quarters. The operating plan to first return the space shuttle to flight and then complete building the core elements of the International Space Station was coupled with returning humans to the Moon and then venturing on to Mars and beyond.

This plan was heralded by many for invigorating the space program and the aerospace industry in a way that had not been witnessed since more than 40 years earlier, when President John F. Kennedy first declared that the nation would go to the Moon. By setting few preconditions and preconceived concepts but offering specific goals, the initiative gave a focus to a national space program that, for the past few years, seemed to have been operating in fits and starts, concentrated on a space station that appeared to serve few scientific purposes (along with some geopolitical ones) and had been rocked on its heels by the devastating loss of the space shuttle Columbia and the subsequent standdown of the shuttles.

Indeed, the mission may also serve to encourage interest in aerospace engineering as both a course of study and as a future career choice for a new generation of students, a development that could not come at a more advantageous time. As has been mentioned previously, the aerospace sector is currently facing an aging workforce, and if the Moon-Mars initiative brings a new generation into the community, it may be deemed a success even before the first vehicle gets off the ground.

But Project Constellation (the name given to the development of the new Crew Exploration Vehicle) and the initiative may have a higher price tag than the dollar figures that appear in the budget. Of late, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration appears to have become the national space agency. NASA's pioneering work in aeronautics, which had been a hallmark of the agency for decades, has all but disappeared. The High Speed Research program was phased out in FY99. On Nov. 16, 2004, the X-43 reached a speed of approximately Mach 10, following its announced cancellation. Other research programs have disappeared as well.

A quick search of the NASA Web site suggests that air traffic management and airport operations studies dominate the aeronautics sector investigations. Even the promising ESTOL (extremely short takeoff and landing) vehicle study was focused on enabling airport operating capabilities.

These are important, significant studies, but they do not reach the heart of what NASA used to be—the home of exhilarating research and development of new classes of airborne vehicles of all shapes and sizes; research that had resulted in the U.S. being the preeminent force in aeronautical development for decades. The European Union recognizes the importance of aeronautical research; its Vision 2020 plan attests to that.

Certainly aircraft, both military and civil, do not fly as quickly, quietly, cleanly, and with as much agility as they might. Our engineers and researchers have the drive, the ability, the creativity to push the envelope. What they lack is the funding. There should be a place in NASA to bring that spark.

We are not finished with flight...are we?

**Elaine Camhi**  
Editor-in-Chief