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Trekonomic Incentives

By Thomas Eldredge

There was a commercial once where the guy who was captain of the space station on *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* said, "I want my flying cars." He was talking about why we hadn't moved further technologically than we had at that time. He sounded serious, but it was because he was being paid to sell credit cards or insurance or something.

I don't want credit cards, insurance, or flying cars. I'll tell you what I want, Captain: I want that damn space station.

We went to the moon before half the people reading this were born. That's right, folks: believe it or not, we went there. We walked all over that bald, bucktooth cousin of ours and showed it what city folk can do out in the country. We figured out that it was cold on one side, hot on the other, and really dusty.

We learned in the process. We learned about the universe and surviving in space and whatnot. We united the human race in purpose for a singular moment in history. It was a pretty good ride. After about five years, we went back home for good. That's the story of our farthest manned exploration of the cosmos. That was nearly 40 years ago.

It took us about 40 years to get from $E = mc^2$ to Hiroshima. It only took about six years once we really got started on the bomb. Later that century, it took us about 20 years to go from DOS 3.1 to the Xbox™. During that time of vital development, we flew the exact same space shuttles. The time from the inception of the Mercury program to the conclusion of the Apollo program spanned about 15 years;

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that's about the same amount of time between our wars in the Middle East. We can do a lot in a short time if we have the incentive.

The lessons of history teach us that our efforts are most united by two things: war and money. The past 40 in particular have taught us that technological advances come from the same incentives. Since we cannot count on an alien attack, if we wish to explore space, we must find money in it.

Making space exploration a public priority isn't an easy sell, because there is little incentive. It takes a great deal of imagination to think of space exploration as a benefit to humanity. It doesn't really seem to benefit anybody except the guy in the spacesuit floating around out there, and he could be out drinking if it wasn't for the stupid mission.

Space exploration would be a hard political platform to run on, and as an issue, it's special-interest at best. Guys in spacesuits who'd rather be drinking don't even constitute a special-interest group. Politicians have learned to stay away from space issues as a talking point, because other than the occasional mention of a mission to Mars, it sounds a little frivolous and kooky.

Furthermore, anything that is of benefit to humanity as a whole can be seen as a threat to national security. Politicians focus on running the government, and that takes money. Politicians spend our money to make more money to be sure we have money to run the government and make more money...for the economy, of course.

Many believe that NASA has been a drain on the economy since its first mission. Only a few, really nerdy people derive any satisfaction from the pursuits of this agency. The gains from the space program are outweighed by the fact that it costs us valuable tax dollars that could be better spent on defense contracts, campaigning, political favors, outright bribes, and other expenses that grease the wheels of democracy.

NASA also creates problems, such as the knowledge that huge meteors and comets might someday destroy human life on earth. This knowledge is counterproductive to economic growth, because it is a threat to security that cannot be shocked and awed into submission. These abstract fears are not conducive to the political process.

Any political group who worries too much about a cosmic apocalypse might as well get tinfoil hats and hang out with L. Ron Hubbard's crew. God is in charge of the apocalypse, and if He wants us to prevent it, He will provide the economic incentive to do so.

The Ansari X Prize[®] was a boon to space exploration, because it gave us a tangible incentive to think about space: money. Financial incentives were offered, and we achieved more in space than we could ever have hoped with socialist ideas of exploration for the benefit of science.

In 2004, *SpaceShipOne* was launched in low orbit and claimed victory for all mankind. For this achievement, some rich guy claimed the \$10-million prize. Nearly \$100 million was invested in research towards this goal.

The *Vostok 1*, piloted by Yuri Gagarin, completed the same feat in 1961, but Yuri didn't win \$10 million, and the

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research was done by commies, so it didn't benefit their economy. It took only 43 years for us to find the means to promote space exploration with direct capitalist incentives.

Science observes that space and time may be infinite, and so, the universe may contain infinite means for human survival within it. There is a hidden danger in this interpretation. To regard the universe itself as an infinite material and scientific resource simply violates the principles of supply and demand. We need demand to run the economy, and with an infinite supply of anything, we lose all demand and the economy crashes.

We must set limits on ourselves regarding space exploration. If we do not, we may find ourselves exploring space with no money to spend once we find somewhere that will take a Visa®.

Commercializing space travel allows us to pursue spaceborne technologies with a mind towards concise goals. Goals like getting me that damn space station. Government-funded research and other socialist abominations can lend themselves to wasteful and frivolous studies not pursuant to economic goals. Commercial space travel will allow us to harness the infinite cosmos to sell more expensive vacation packages and support vast service industries that will fuel our economy.

It may also provide us raw materials and scientific data, but any available resource will be properly fought over to establish ownership. These future wars and conflicts over resources in space will give us new technologies to go deeper into the universe to seek more and more wealth to fight over.

I want that space station, and I'd join the Federation or the Alliance or the freaking Empire to get it. I want that space station because I want to see the universe and hire really smart people to go study all of it and tell me what it's all about. I think a space station out in the Gamma Quadrant would be a good start.

I'd need money to run the space station and hire all those smart people. Fortunately, a space station is also a great source of revenue from tourism, commerce, and people paying to not be exposed to the vacuum of space.

To provide even more economic incentive for space exploration, I present the Gimme Space Station U Prize. The winner will be the first person to get me that space station, and the prize will be \$50 in MySpaceStation Bucks and a gift certificate to not be exposed to the vacuum of space.

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