

COMMENTARY

GUEST EDITORIAL

Honoring success in America and in space

The links to Folsom

BY ROBERT R. SLATER JR.,
M.D.

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America ought to have a new holiday: Lunar Landing Day. It will be celebrated every July 20 in honor of the first time humans landed on the Moon.

On July 20, 1969, the whole world watched in wonder as the Eagle landed on the moon as part of the Apollo 11 mission. That was one of the most important and impactful events in human history. Human beings walked on the surface of another celestial body.

This is a call for people everywhere to join the effort of a growing national coalition (lunarlanding-day.net) to turn the vision of a new holiday into reality.

Among other things, it would provide an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of STEM education and to work toward improving the curriculum for students of all backgrounds, all across the nation.

The next generation of students in the USA is lagging behind many other nations in terms of STEM proficiency. Getting American students excited about the thrilling accomplishments of this nation's scientific missions that put humans on the surface of the Moon and brought all of them safely home again will surely engender greater enthusiasm for studying how that was done and what can be done beyond that on future space exploration missions.

We are missing out on the chance to celebrate a national success story at a time when the need to



unite around something positive has never been greater, given the divisive conditions we face today.

It is important for people in this area to know that Folsom has direct ties to the Apollo 11 mission, as well as several other NASA missions. The rocket engines that were used on the Saturn 5 rocket to carry the Apollo 11 astronauts to the Moon and back were designed and built next door in Rancho Cordova at Aerojet, and several of the engineers and employees working there lived in Folsom. In addition, many of the devices and technologies we all use and rely on today in everyday life are direct spinoffs of the scientific knowledge gained from the Apollo missions.

There are many examples of missed opportunities for reporting on the impact of the Apollo 11 mission. For instance, consider that on Aug. 10, 2023, the Russians launched an unmanned spacecraft that was designed to send a lander to the surface of the moon. The following morning, news media outlets across the USA reported on that Luna 25 mission with major headlines and coverage.

A few days later, on Aug. 23, 2023, there were multiple news stories in many outlets about the successful

landing of a different spacecraft near the south pole of the moon, this time by India, another of America's competitors in space. Yet, there was not even a whisper about the anniversary of the first humans on the moon in 1969 when that date rolled past just a few weeks before that.

That unbalanced reporting of the space exploration missions launched by other nations while ignoring the anniversary of the Apollo missions is deeply disappointing. We can do better in this country. We can educate more people in school and in society at large about the accomplishments of more than 410,000 people spread across all 50 states striving together as a united country to achieve the successes of the Apollo missions. This can serve as a valuable teaching moment about what we can accomplish as a nation when we all pull together.

Perhaps one day soon, the accomplishments of the people working hard to ensure the glorious success of the Apollo 11 mission will earn a holiday. Then we can hear and read stories in the news that applaud the success of the space program in America as well as in Russia, China, India, Japan and other nations. We can all hope so.

CONTACT US

101 Parkshore Drive, Folsom, Ca 95630
916-985-2581 folsomtelegraph.com