



# vertiflite Commentary

## The 2006 NASA Budget Request and Broken Promises

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We beg to differ with T.S. Elliot, who famously penned *The Waste Land* in which he wrote "April is the cruellest month, breeding lilacs out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire, stirring dull roots with spring rain." In the nation's capital, where priorities are easily skewed and promises are made to be broken, bad things – like budgets - tend to happen in the month of February. The President's Budget Request for 2006, announced February 7, delivers the penultimate nail into the NASA aeronautics coffin.

The process of dismantling the nation's once-vaunted aeronautics research capability originated several years ago under then-NASA Administrator Dan Goldin (remember "faster, better, cheaper?"). Goldin terminated the Advanced Subsonic and High Speed Transport programs – two pillars of aeronautics research and development. Now NASA finds itself unable to fund the President's vision for missions to "the Moon, Mars and Beyond." Accordingly, the White House Office of Management and Budget has directed NASA management to eliminate all or nearly all funding for subsonic aeronautics, hypersonics, and ultra-efficient engine technology. All rotorcraft research is eliminated. Not a shred of what was once a NASA aeronautics core competency is allowed to remain intact. NASA Center Directors have announced more than 2,500 job cuts – 1000 at NASA Langley, 800 at NASA Ames and 700 at NASA Glenn.

Overall funding for NASA aeronautics will drop from well over \$1.2 billion in the late 1990s to just \$727 million by 2009. Speaking of promises, this is 23% lower than projected just a year ago. Less than 10% of NASA's current budget is allocated to aeronautics, but this falls to less than 6% by 2010 as space exploration ramps up. The President's Budget Request cuts the Vehicle Systems program led by Dr. Richard Wlezien from \$568.6 million in fiscal year 2005 to just \$373.6 million in fiscal year 2007. University research – once viewed as sacrosanct by NASA managers – is slashed. NASA-funded research on revolutionary rotorcraft technology at the University of Maryland, Georgia Tech and Penn State is eliminated. These actions effectively close off the academic pipeline for the nation's future skilled aeronautics researchers. The Pres-



ident's Budget Proposal dumps the Army-NASA partnership to collaborate on rotorcraft research – a model partnership since 1965 – without so much as a footnote. (Returning to the subject of promises, as recently as 2003, NASA – with the knowledge of OMB – endorsed an agreement to match the Army's investment.)

When NASA in 2003 closed the nation's only large-scale wind tunnel – the National Full-Scale Aerodynamics Complex located at NASA Ames, it shocked many observers since federal regulations still on the books require NASA to maintain and operate the NFAC for the benefit of government agencies. But who cares about federal regulations anymore?

Winter brought more news as dreary as the weather. On February 3, NASA headquarters circulated an internal memo stating its intent to close in 2006 a long list of aeronautics test facilities – 13 in all, mostly located at the Langley and Glenn Research Centers. Among these are the 14'x22' Subsonic Tunnel and the Propulsion Systems Laboratory. So at these centers even more job cuts – far beyond those already announced - loom on the horizon. As a result, if a future administration should demonstrate an interest in aeronautics, NASA will lack the capability to perform that research since aviation scientists and engineers will no longer have access to an aeronautics research, development, test and evaluation infrastructure.

The domestic aerospace industry generated a foreign trade surplus in 2004 of \$32 billion – the largest of any industrial segment. This is now threatened by the failure of government support for NASA aeronautics. By comparison, Europe has more than doubled its investment in the past decade with the goal of attaining world leadership in aerospace – a goal the E.U. has largely achieved while the U.S. government lay sleeping.

In the movie "Dave," Kevin Kline plays a stand-in for the president of the United States when the real president is incapacitated. When Dave learns that "his" administration has eliminated a much-needed \$650 million program to provide housing for the poor, a program supported by the real president's wife, he calls in his personal accountant and together – working through the night – they craft efficiencies in government that generate sufficient funds to restore the program.

What the aeronautics community in the United States lacks is a champion with common sense like "Dave." In the meantime, we will always have "February." 