

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this amendment and commend my friend Congressman Posey for his work on this jobs initiative.

Florida is home to Kennedy Space Center, the heart of NASA's space shuttle program. With tens of thousands of highly-skilled men and women currently working on the Space Coast in support of NASA's human space flight program, their jobs are threatened by the Administration's decision to end the shuttle program and cancel Constellation without a viable plan for the future of space exploration. These jobs will be lost, possibly forever, and in the midst of a housing and economic recession not seen in Florida in decades. Mr. Speaker, the truth is that the Space Coast cannot afford to lose these jobs.

That is why I am proud to stand with Mr. Posey in support of this much needed amendment. Make no mistake; this is a jobs amendment – one that will help support families and small businesses throughout Central Florida. Specifically this amendment commits the Department of Defense to use the National Shuttle Logistics Depot to the greatest extent practicable and to assist in the preservation of our highly skilled aerospace and engineering workforce. By utilizing already existing infrastructure and a trained workforce, the government can leverage this unique skill set to advance our nation's space and defense missions at minimal cost to the American taxpayer.

The aerospace workers across the country have already been hit by an economy struggling under the tax and spend policies of the President and now, without a solid plan from NASA on what is next for the space program, the industry base will simply disappear. This is an easy way for the federal government to utilize the resources we already have to help create aerospace jobs throughout the country, without throwing away decades of technology and laying off tens of thousands of highly skilled workers.

Mr. Speaker, when governments like China are gearing up for the next big explosion in space industry and a technology, preserving this workforce is not just about ensuring people have jobs – it is about the national security interests of our nation.

If we lose this national asset, I fear we will forever be remembered as the country that gave up the last frontier. One that looked to the stars and told the world we weren't interested.

I encourage all of my colleagues to vote in favor of this jobs amendment to help save a workforce we desperately need.