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SPACE: THE SHUTTLE AND BEYOND
by G. Donald Ferree, Jr.

The Wisconsin public has a generally favorable view of space exploration. The shuttle disaster has not produced a disillusionment with the idea of manned space flight, and -- at least as the investigation is in its early phases -- NASA does not come in for too much criticism. These are among the conclusions drawn from the most recent Badger Poll™, which interviewed 504 randomly chosen state residents by telephone between February 11 and 19th, inclusive.

There is some evidence that space shuttle flights had become pretty routine in the minds of Wisconsin residents. When respondents were asked "before the space shuttle disaster, did you pay much attention to the flights of the space shuttle or not", just over four in ten (43%) said they had, while over half (56%) said they had not. As a group, men were slightly more likely than women (by about nine points to say they had paid attention to the shuttle). Younger respondents (those under thirty) were markedly different from the three older groups -- only one in six of the former, but around half of those older had paid attention to the shuttle.

The shuttle program does, however, seem to enjoy wide basic support. Eight in ten (79%) respondents said they favored "the US space shuttle program". Men again were more likely than women (by around ten points) to take a "pro-space" stance. This is not a very strong partisan issue. Republicans and Independents were a little more likely to favor the shuttle program than Democrats, but three in four of the Democrats also did. In contrast to following shuttle flights, those under forty-five voiced more support than those at or above that age, although differences are scarcely overwhelming.

Four in ten (41%) answered "yes" when asked, "if you had a chance to go into space, do you think you'd take it". These overall figures mask some group differences. Men (yes by 51%-47%) were more likely than women (no by 61%-37%) to say they would venture into space.

Democrats (one third would go) were somewhat less likely than either Independents or Republicans (about half of whom would) to say they would like to go into space themselves. Willingness dropped with age, beginning at almost six in ten among the youngest group, half among the next oldest, four in ten for the next, and (a perhaps surprisingly high) two in ten for the eldest.

When respondents were asked to say what they would have done "if you had been offered this chance BEFORE the shuttle disaster", responses overall were very similar. Just a few more (43%) said they would have flown then. The patterns

are also very similar across groups, with the typical group showing no more than a few percentage point differences. (Of course, from the "marginals", it would be possible that individuals changed their minds without moving the overall results much, if the group than changed from yes to no was balanced by the group changing from no to yes. In fact, however, fewer than one in twenty respondents actually answered the two questions differently.

Two of these questions (or close variants) were included in an earlier Badger Poll™, conducted last March. Results then, which are summarized in the accompanying table, show little "negative" impact in the immediate wake of Columbia's loss. Then, when respondents were asked about their support for the space program in general, seven in ten (70%) favored it, compared to today's just shy of eight in ten (79%).

The question about going into space found 37% saying they would like to go, and 62% saying they would not. This is slightly less than the proportion expressing willingness now (41%), but the difference is at the edge of the "margin of error", so one can have only limited confidence that this difference is due to a real shift in the population rather than in who we happened to interview. And, it should be noted, today's respondents claimed they would have been at least as willing to go into space while the overall results were in the other direction. Putting the two indications together, neither poll provides evidence of a lessening of interest, and may be consistent with a "stiff upper lip" reaction. Other public attitudes provide a mixed message for NASA. When respondents were asked about spending on the space program (not specifically the shuttle), the largest group (40%) felt outlays were just the right amount. Among the half who would make a change, however, those who felt "too much" was being spent outnumbered those who felt "too little" was by a three to two (30%-20%) margin.

Women were more critical than men. Democrats were more likely to feel too much was being spent than either of the other partisan groups, who on balance favored a move in neither direction. Except for those thirty to forty-four all age groups were somewhat more likely to feel too much was being spent than too little, but the most common opinion in all groups was that the appropriate amount was going to this area.

So far, the public manifests a good deal of confidence in the space agency when it comes to both their past and future decision-making relative to shuttle safety. Two thirds (64%) said that NASA had NOT "compromised safety standards in order to speed up shuttle flights", while one in four (25%) said it had not. Group differences are small, although the balance of no's over yes's is weakest among the oldest group, who also are most likely not to voice an opinion.

Looking to the future, about three in four (72%) say that NASA will act appropriately when it comes to resuming shuttle flights (neither too quick nor too slow). Moreover, the one respondent in four who thinks the agency will err, is more likely to say NASA will move too slowly than too quickly (17% compared to 7%). Again there are no sharp group differences, although Republicans are a bit less likely to fear too quick a resumption. Younger residents manifest a bit less confidence than older residents do.

Looked at a little differently, almost eight in ten (78%) say that when the shuttle does next fly, it will be as safe as possible at that time, while just under one in five (18%) believe there will "still be major safety problems". This time it is the oldest group who show least confidence (by ten to fifteen points), Republicans are modestly the most pro-NASA, while there is essentially no gender distinction.

This survey also repeated some more general questions about space exploration which were included in the first Badger Poll™. In the wake of the shuttle disaster, the public overall shows general support for maintaining a balance between manned and unmanned exploration. Seven in ten (69%) believe the future emphases on the two types of mission should be kept about the same. Those who would place more on UNmanned space missions (Voyager was used as an example) outnumber those who would shift the emphasis in the opposite direction by roughly ten points.

Women were modestly less inclined to back emphasis on human flight than men were, and manned flight was somewhat more likely to be the majority opinion was to leave the relative emphases where they are.

Eight in ten said that "if you had a son or daughter who wanted to be an astronaut", they would encourage them in this ambition. Only one in ten (10%) would discourage them. Almost as many (8%) said they would back whatever their offspring wanted. Though they did not prompt for it, interviews were told to record instances where respondents made a distinction between a son and a daughter. Only one percent did (saying hey would be more likely to encourage a son).

Men were somewhat more enthusiastic than women (but less than ten points different). Democrats were least encouraging, Independent most (but three in four or more of each group would encourage an offspring to become an astronaut. With the same caveat, those thirty to forty-four would receive this news most positively, those sixty and older least so.

Last year, results were generally similar. Just under seven in ten then would keep the present balance between manned and unmanned missions. (Those looking for a shift were perhaps slightly more evenly split a year ago, but the difference is so small one should not overinterpret it). Overall answers to the question about a son or daughter wanting to be an astronaut followed a pattern in March of 2002 which is essentially indistinguishable from what we now find.

Manned, or human-crewed flight, does continue to find broad support. Looking back, almost nine in ten (87%) say that "if we were making the decision all over again", the United States should still have gone to the moon. Those over sixty, women, are a bit less likely to agree, and Republicans a bit more so, but strong majorities in all groups continue to endorse the moon mission. These results show no diminution of support since last March.

Looking to the future, six in ten (61%) back a US manned mission to Mars, while one in three (34%) oppose it. Men are about ten points more in favor than women. This is NOT a clear partisan issue. Support is strongest among those thirty to forty-four and weakest among those sixty and over, among whom only a narrow plurality backs the idea.

Sentiment overall is similar if one asks instead about "an international manned mission to Mars. The balance of opinion (65%-30% is slightly more favorable. The notion gains support very slightly among both men and women, but while Democrats and Independents are both slightly more likely to back an international mission, Republicans are slightly less so. Backing does (again very modestly) increase across all age groups. Overall, while some nineteen of twenty of those who back a US mission also approve of an international effort, cooperation with other country's picks up almost one in five of those who either opposed a US mission or who expressed no opinion.

Cross-Time Comparison on Shuttle Related Views

	FEB03	MAR02
View of shuttle/space program+		
FAVOR	79%	70%
OPPOSE	19	23
DON'T KNOW	3	6
REFUSED	*	1
Go into space personally		
YES	41%	37%
NO	57	62
DON'T KNOW	2	1
REFUSED	--	*
Future space emphasis		
MORE ON MANNED	8%	12%
MORE ON UNMANNED	19	17
ABOUT THE SAME	69	68
DON'T KNOW	4	3
REFUSED	1	1
Son/daughter as astronaut		
ENCOURAGE	80%	80%
DISCOURAGE	10	13
ENCOURAGE SON (VOL.)	1	--
DISCOURAGE SON (VOL.)	--	*
WHATEVER WANT (VOL.)	8	7
DON'T KNOW	1	*
REFUSED	*	*

+February referred to the shuttle program, in March to space program

Overall results last year, shown in the accompanying table, were essentially the same as what we find now. This suggests that the events of the past year have not materially changed the general reaction to extending our sphere of exploration with human crews.

A final question looked at the perceived impact of the space program (in general) on life on earth. Overall, six in ten (61%) said that "the space program has made life on earth better because of technological advances". Only one in ten (10%) said that it was "worse because money was spent there instead of other ways". Almost three in ten (27%) felt spending on space had "not really made that much difference one way or the other".

Men and Republicans were modestly more likely to see benefits from space. Those thirty to forty-four perceived improvement from technological advances most commonly, those sixty and over and those under thirty least so. (The older group was less likely to see advantages, but also less likely to see the costs than those under thirty were).

About a year ago, the view was generally similar overall to what we find now: 57% thought life had been improved; 12% that it had been worsened; 30% saw no difference. While this left the "balance" a bit less favorable than it is now, the differences are small enough for caution to be necessary in

Cross-Time Comparison on Views of Space Program (Part II)

	FEB03	MAR02
Should US have gone to moon		
YES	87%	86%
NO	10	12
DON'T KNOW	2	1
REFUSED	--	*
US Mars mission		
FAVOR	61%	61%
OPPOSE	34	34
ONLY W/OTHERS (VOL.)	*	--
DON'T KNOW	5	4
REFUSED	*	1
International space station		
FAVOR	65%	65%
OPPOSE	30	31
DON'T KNOW	4	4
REFUSED	1	*
Impact on everyday life		
MADE LIFE BETTER	61%	57%
WORSE BY DIVERTING	10	12
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	27	30
DON'T KNOW	3	1
REFUSED	*	*

interpreting them as reflecting real meaningful shifts in the population. In any event, there seems to have been no lessening of this basically pro-space attitude over the past year or so.

Statewide Marginals and Percentages for Key Groups

What follows is the exact question wording for each of the items referred to in the release. All results shown are for the basic sample of state residents. The first column is the percentage of the entire sample giving each response. The second and third reports the percentages for men and women separately. The fourth, fifth, and sixth columns show self-described Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Columns seven through ten group respondents by age.

Q01. INTERVIEWER: (DO NOT ASK) Enter respondent's gender

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MALE	49%	100%	--%	40%	52%	55%	48%	53%	48%	44%
FEMALE	51	--	100	61	48	45	52	47	52	56

SHUT08. Do you think NASA compromised safety standards in order to speed up shuttle flights, or not?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
YES	25%	24%	25%	28%	28%	22%	31%	19%	25%	28%
NO	64	67	61	59	60	70	63	69	68	50
DON'T KNOW	12	9	15	13	12	9	6	13	7	21
REFUSED	*	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	1

SHUT09. And now, do you think NASA will be too quick to resume shuttle flights, too slow, or about right?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
TOO QUICKLY	7%	7%	6%	10%	6%	2%	16%	5%	5%	7%
TOO SLOWLY	17	19	15	15	20	19	13	20	18	11
AS SHOULD	72	69	74	72	68	77	67	69	75	76
DON'T KNOW	5	5	5	4	6	2	4	6	3	7
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

SHUT11. When the shuttle DOES next fly, do you think it will be as safe as possible at that time, or will there still be major safety problems.

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
SAFE AS POSSIBLE	78%	79%	78%	75%	76%	88%	78%	80%	83%	68%
MAJOR SAFETY PROBLEMS	18	18	18	23	18	8	21	17	15	22
WON'T FLY AGAIN (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DON'T KNOW	4	3	4	2	5	4	1	3	2	10
REFUSED	*	1	--	--	1	--	--	--	1	--

SPA04. Up to now, the U.S. space program has involved both manned flights -- such as the shuttle -- and unmanned probes such as the Voyager spacecraft. For the future, do you think we should put more emphasis on manned flights than we have, more on unmanned missions, or keep it about the same?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MORE ON MANNED	8%	10%	5%	8%	8%	9%	7%	8%	8%	5%
MORE ON UNMANNED	19	13	25	18	28	18	15	12	23	27
ABOUT THE SAME	69	73	65	71	61	70	76	76	65	63
DON'T KNOW	4	3	5	3	4	2	3	3	4	5
REFUSED	1	1	*	*	*	1	--	1	--	1

SPA05. If you had a son or daughter who wanted to be an astronaut, would you encourage them to do this or discourage them?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
ENCOURAGE	80%	84%	76%	76%	87%	84%	81%	89%	83%	63%
DISCOURAGE	10	5	15	13	6	9	10	3	12	19
ENCOURAGE SON (VOL.)	1	1	1	1	--	1	3	--	--	1
ENC. DAUGHTER (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DISCOURAGE SON (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
DISC. DAUGHTER (VOL.)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
WHATEVER WANT (VOL.)	8	8	7	8	7	5	6	7	5	14
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	1	1	*	--	1	--	3
REFUSED	*	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	1

SPA06. Some thirty years ago, American astronauts landed on the moon for the first time. If we were making the decision all over again, do you think we should have gone to the moon?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
YES	87%	90%	85%	83%	86%	94%	87%	94%	86%	80%
NO	10	7	13	14	12	5	13	4	13	15
DON'T KNOW	2	3	2	3	1	1	--	2	1	5
REFUSED	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

SPA07. And would you favor or oppose sending a U.S. manned mission to Mars?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVOR	61%	66%	56%	60%	62%	67%	60%	72%	57%	49%
OPPOSE	34	31	36	36	31	29	36	20	40	43
ONLY W/OTHERS (VOL.)	*	--	1	1	--	--	--	--	--	2
DON'T KNOW	5	3	7	3	6	4	4	7	3	6
REFUSED	*	--	1	--	*	1	--	--	--	2

SPA08. How about an international manned mission to Mars? Would you favor or oppose that?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
FAVOR	65%	70%	60%	68%	72%	63%	63%	78%	61%	55%
OPPOSE	30	28	32	29	25	32	35	16	35	39
DON'T KNOW	4	1	7	2	2	3	3	5	3	3
REFUSED	1	1	1	1	*	2	--	--	1	2

SPA09. Overall, do you think the space program has made life on earth better because of technological advances, made it worse because money was spent there instead of other ways, or not really made that much difference one way or the other?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
MADE LIFE BETTER	61%	65%	57%	58%	59%	70%	61%	63%	64%	54%
WORSE BY DIVERTING	10	8	12	12	5	10	19	5	9	10
NOT MUCH DIFFERENCE	27	24	29	27	32	18	18	31	24	33
DON'T KNOW	3	3	3	2	4	2	2	2	3	2
REFUSED	*	*	--	*	--	--	--	--	--	1

QD05. Generally speaking, do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or something else?

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
DEMOCRAT	30%	25%	36%	100%	--%	--%	30%	28%	28%	40%
REPUBLICAN	29	33	26	--	--	100	33	31	27	28
INDEPENDENT	25	27	24	--	100	--	21	26	28	21
OTHER	9	8	9	--	--	--	7	11	10	4
NONE	5	6	4	--	--	--	5	3	7	5
DON'T KNOW	1	1	1	--	--	--	4	1	--	1
REFUSED	1	--	1	--	--	--	--	--	*	2

QD11. In what year were you born? (ENTER FOUR-DIGIT YEAR) (Calculated and grouped as below)

	TOT	GENDER		PARTISANSHIP			AGE IN YEARS			
		M	F	DEM	IND	REP	<30	<45	<60	60+
18-29	14%	14%	14%	13%	12%	15%	100%	--%	--%	--%
30-44	31	33	28	28	32	33	--	100	--	--
45-59	33	33	34	31	36	30	--	--	100	--
60 and over	20	18	22	27	17	19	--	--	--	100
DK/REFUSED	3	3	3	2	4	2	--	--	--	--

* denotes less than .5%

-- denotes 0%

HOW THE POLL WAS DONE

This BADGER POLL™ was conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Center as part of its ongoing program of research designed to benefit the research community and the people of Wisconsin, under the direction of G. Donald Ferree, Jr., Associate Director for Public Opinion Research of the Center. The media sponsors of the survey are the (Madison) Capital Times, and the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel. The BADGER POLL™ is intended to be a "poll of record" for the state, investigating matters of concern to Wisconsinites including politics, culture, and their daily lives, adhering to the highest standards of polling methodology and rigorous independence.

A total of 504 randomly chosen state residents were interviewed for this survey by telephone between February 11 and 19, inclusive. Telephone numbers were generated by computer in proportion to the number of adults living in each area of the state. Theoretically, results from this survey have a "margin of

error" of a little over +/- 4%. This means that, had we asked every eligible resident in Wisconsin, exactly these questions at the time the survey was conducted, there is only a one in twenty chance that the answers would differ by more than that in either direction from what we report here. There could be differences because of changes in question wording, events occurring in the meantime, or any of the practical difficulties involved in taking a scientific survey. Results based on subgroups are subject to a larger "margin of error".