

Failure to launch: The US doesn't need 4 more years of Kamala Harris

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Three and a half years ago, Vice President Kamala Harris was given two primary roles: ***oversight of the border and chair of the National Space Council***. In her role as the head of the Space Council, her responsibility has been to review and develop all space policies and strategies. To succeed, she must have a basic understanding of human space exploration and science. This includes the ***Artemis program***, designed to reestablish our presence on the Moon in preparation to go to Mars. A super heavy-lift rocket, the Space Launch System Block 1B on Artemis IV is needed to establish ourselves on the Moon. A much stronger Mobile Launcher is being built to accommodate this larger rocket.

NASA admits this launcher is costing three times what was planned, and delivery has been delayed more than four years. The NASA inspector general now reports that the launcher will not be ready in time for the planned rocket launch. To make matters worse, due to design changes, more cost increases are expected. After delivery of the new launcher, there will be more software and testing costs. Despite what is needed, to lessen future cost increases, the prime contractor's requirements were reduced.

The current contract requires NASA to pay for any overruns. In 2021, when ***Harris became the Space Council chair***, the total cost of the launcher was **\$682 million**. Today, the total program cost is **\$1.8 billion** — except that the NASA inspector general disagrees with NASA's estimate and projects that the cost could be as high as **\$2.7 billion**.

This fiasco occurred on Harris's watch. Having done little to ensure our return to the Moon remains on time and within budget, ***Harris may have ensured that we cannot afford the Artemis program at all***. If so, China has a much-improved chance of reaching the Moon before us and claiming the areas of the Moon with the greatest amount of resources — for example, water ice — needed to establish a presence on the lunar surface.

During this time, ***Harris should have been proactively working to ensure the success of the new launcher***. Instead, ***more failed efforts critical to the Artemis program are piling up***. What we cannot afford is this lack of leadership in our space program, ***which will continue if Harris wins the presidential election***.

Former President Donald Trump's Space Council had created the vision for reaching Mars using the Moon as a proving ground. Trump directed us to get this program going and to get it done quickly. Today, ***the current vice president's inaction and lack of basic preparation has created a void in our space policies***. We now have a space program with numerous issues.

Harris owns the failure to keep the Artemis program on-track and viable. This grim situation is unfolding, and continues to unfold, on her watch.

To be fair, there are no easy solutions to address such challenges. Space is unforgiving and, at times, high-risk. ***To minimize that danger, we need successful space policies and programs***, including the Artemis program, along with a dogged leader to make them work. Otherwise, we will lose our lead in space and, as we have seen ***with her performance, face more bad outcomes***.

With both the Mobile Launcher and Vice President Harris, four more years are not what we need.