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Lobbying

Lobbyists Count Down To Lift-Off of Commercial Spaceflight

Paul Stimers grew up with two distinct passions that, when put together, have helped to propel the developing commercial spaceflight industry forward.

Inspired by TV programs such as “Matlock,” Stimers knew he wanted to be a lawyer since the fourth grade. The theme of his bedroom told a different story, as the walls were covered in space ships and a plot of the space shuttle’s journey.

Becoming an astronaut, however, was never in the stars for him.

“The Challenger explosion was a defining moment in my childhood. It didn’t scare me away from space, but brought home to me what a challenging endeavor space really is and why it is worth doing,” Stimers said. “I’m useless as an astronaut, but I want everybody who wants to go to space to be able to go, both as a matter of ability and as a matter of economics.”

His passion for policy and law kept him grounded. So instead of an astronaut, he’s a space lobbyist.

As commercial spaceflight edges closer, Stimers said, he wanted to help define policies that would regulate the industry or push it further along.

“I had known for a long time that I wanted to be involved with government, not necessarily from the inside, but to be involved in policy in some way,” Stimers told Bloomberg BNA over lunch at the K&L Gates D.C. office—a firm he has been with since he graduated from Harvard Law School in 2002.

Originally from Washington state, Stimers said he jumped at the chance to work in the other Washington because it provided the gateway he needed to influence policy at the federal level.

Stimers is an example of someone who followed a dream—but that’s not so with all in the industry. Space lobbyist and consultant Jim Muncy stumbled upon the field by chance.

Muncy has worked on the staffs of pro-space politicians including former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.). He also worked as a science adviser for the Reagan White House and House Committee on Science, Space and Technology. In 2000, he started PoliSpace, a consulting firm in Washington.

Like Stimers, Muncy said he wanted to be a voice for the commercial space industry.

“It’s the most valuable thing I have ever done, and it’s why I haven’t stopped doing it,” Muncy told Bloomberg BNA. “I’ve been working on space policy for 35 years, and I will do this until I retire.”

The Industry Takeoff. Richard Branson’s Virgin Galactic has begun selling tickets for the first commercial launches of humans into space. Tickets cost \$250,000 each—a price Stimers said was affordable for someone on a comfortable salary.

“Only 500 to 600 people have been to space in human history, and it would be cool to knock that off your bucket list and to be able to say that you were one of the first thousand people to actually see space up close,” Stimers said.

The NASA Authorization Act of 2010 (Pub. L. No. 111-267) gave the agency the authority to work with commercial space companies to send cargo and satellites to the International Space Station. Muncy said sending humans into space on the same commercial spacecraft is the logical next step.

“Space shouldn’t be just some weird thing that the government does and we watch on TV,” Muncy said. “It is an essential part of our economy, and you’re going to see that increase as it becomes cheaper to launch people into space.”

Colonization or Extinction. Both K&L Gates and PoliSpace focus their space lobbying efforts on ensuring new policies cover—but not limit—innovative technologies. They also push for private investors and companies to invest in space missions while encouraging industry competition.

“We are finally seeing a flowering of all sorts of commercial, education and nonprofit uses of space that we didn’t think of before, and it’s exciting,” Muncy said.

Echoing Elon Musk (SpaceX) and Jeff Bezos (Blue Origin), Stimers said the future of human life will rely on the colonization of space.

“Soon, we will only have two options: human extinction or millions of people living and working in space,” he said.

The industry has progressed with recent successful missions of Blue Origin’s New Shepard Rocket and Space X’s Falcon 9 and advancements in booster recovery. Stimers said it’s exciting to see that some innovative technologies portrayed in shows such as “Star Trek” no longer seem impossible or even a hundred years away. Rather, he said, within a decade or so anyone who can afford it might have the opportunity to see beyond the curvature of the Earth.

“I have always believed that it is important to dream as we work,” Stimers said. “There were people who

doubted that we would ever get off the ground, and look where we are now.”

“Commercial spaceflight is not just possible,” he said. “It’s inevitable.”

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