Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE)

An accompanying story of White House-induced and NASA self-inflicted management complexity despite which incredible mission success ensued

Noel W. Hinners  PI Forum  April 27, 2010
Agnew Sept. 1969 STG Report
Manned Mars option DOA

Pres. Nixon buying the partly reusable Space Shuttle from NASA Adm. Fletcher - but not a Space Station
Jan. 5, 1972

Thus started 50 years of angst for Space Science
COBE: Enmeshed in a web of challenges

1974 AO-6 Solicited Explorers for ‘78 to ‘82 flight
- Launch on Delta, Scout - or Shuttle when available
1976 Dictum: Ye shall use Shuttle for all US launches
- Thus COBE designed for Shuttle
- Thus ELVs moved to OMSF, Life Sciences to OSS
1984 Decision to implement COBE in Engineering for hands-on management and build experience
1986 Challenger altered the rules
- COBE changed to Delta II (a management challenge)
  • Eventually stressed center manpower
1989 Launch and success
Mission success is ultimately a function of superb leadership.