



## Preface to the Proceedings of the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Wisconsin Space Conference

Greetings from the middle? End? Just the beginning? of the latest government shutdown. As I write, I'm slouched in an overstuffed chair in the lobby of the historic *Hotel El Capitan* in Van Horn, Texas. Van Horn is in remote west Texas, more than 100 miles from the nearest Walmart. Here three students and I await, once again, the probabilities to multiply in our favor and allow (finally) a launch of the Blue Origin New Shepard rocket carrying our payload experiment. Two generations of students have worked on this experiment across several years. This is the second trip in support of this launch, the first scuttled by unspecified ground support issues and the beginning of the government shutdown in late December, 2018. Here we are again, one month later, awaiting word on whether this launch attempt will proceed. All of the payloads on the launch manifest are NASA-supported, but no NASA personnel can legally be here to support their experiments. Something important is missing here.



Blue Origin Payload Team Members  
Celestine Ananda and Nick Bartel at  
the top of Texas.

While the effects of the shutdown on both NASA and commercial launch activities are clear and present this month, the effects on the WSGC and on Space Grant programming generally is still unknown. We continue to make scholarship awards, support student and faculty research, and encourage the development of STEM outreach and engagement. For how much longer is unclear. With each award we are farther out on a limb with no guarantee that the funds to make good on the awards will arrive. One thing is certain, when politicians decide to resume supporting the basic functions of government, the spin-up of agency operations will be slow and chaotic. The very smallest pieces of the federal pie, like the Space Grant program, will continue to reel from the effects of D.C. chaos long into the new year.

The down-time did give us a chance to find inspiration in a different direction. Launch delays and the vagaries of the shutdown have given my students and I excellent opportunities to hike and explore the ancient lands of West Texas. If we can't make it to space this week, we can at least take solace in having made it to Guadalupe Peak, the highest point in Texas, from which one can survey thousands of acres of national park land, closed to visitors for the foreseeable future.

*Kevin M. Crosby, Director, WSGC     January, 2019*