

Property Taxes are out of this World

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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While flipping through the TV channels the other night, I came across the Star Trek episode 'Court Martial.' In this classic, Captain Kirk is framed for the murder of a crewman. Thanks to his convictions and Spock's intellect, they foil the plot of the presumed victim, Records Officer Benjamin Finney, who had faked his own death. Finney hoped to frame him, as he was jealous of Kirk's advancement in Starfleet.

During Kirk's court martial, The Fundamental Declarations of the Martian Colonies were cited. In the Star Trek universe, these were important legal documents drafted on the planet Mars that outlined human rights throughout the galaxy. As mankind began to colonize the solar system and beyond, the Declarations were created to recognize the colonies' autonomy from Earth.

While a document outlining human rights for planetary colonies seems like a typical science fiction plot device, it's actually based on fact. 'Court Martial' aired on February 2, 1967, but a week earlier, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States introduced the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.

Because that was quite a mouthful, the document became known as simply 'The Outer Space Treaty.' Created by the world's super powers, the Treaty forms the basis for international space law. As of this year, 102 countries are parties to the treaty, while another 27 have signed the treaty but have not completed ratification by their governments.

In true Star Trek fashion, the Treaty states that the exploration of outer space shall be done to benefit all countries and shall be free for exploration and use by all. The Treaty specifically precludes any government from staking a claim on the Moon or any planet, explaining that these celestial bodies are the common heritage of mankind. Article II of the Treaty reads, "outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means."

Under the Treaty, countries are not allowed to place nuclear weapons or any other weapons of mass destruction in orbit of Earth, installing them on the Moon or any other celestial body, or to otherwise station them in outer space. Testing weapons of any kind, conducting military maneuvers, or establishing military bases, installations, and fortifications on any celestial bodies is also forbidden. The Treaty states that the Moon and other celestial bodies are only to be used for peaceful purposes.

Interesting to note, however, is that while countries are precluded from colonizing celestial bodies, private individuals or organizations are not.

As a result, McDonald's purportedly looked at opening a restaurant on the Moon. They ultimately decided to abort the launch, however, because while the food may have been delicious, the restaurant had no atmosphere.