

OUR VIEW Curiosity mission is well worth the expense Days after landing on Mars, NASA's rover, Curiosity, is still capturing the attention and imagination of millions back on Earth.

Posted: Friday, August 10, 2012 1:00 am | *Updated: 11:32 pm, Thu Aug 9, 2012.*

Devin Rokyta, for the Moscow-Pullman Daily News editorial board

And why not? The car-sized rover traveled more than eight months and 352 million miles before making a dramatic landing Sunday on the Red Planet. Since its arrival, Curiosity has sent us a steady flow of photographs of the planet's barren landscape, including Thursday's 360-degree color panorama of Gale Crater with the base of Mount Sharp, a three-mile-high mountain rising from the crater floor, in the distance.

It's just among the first of many photos Curiosity is expected to beam back to Earth during the course of its two-year mission in which the roaming laboratory will analyze rocks and soil and determine whether there were once habitable conditions on Mars.

While most have watched in awe of the mission and applauded NASA's efforts, others are questioning whether the \$2.6 billion price tag of the mission is worth the cost as the federal government slashes social programs and ponders cuts in other safety nets many struggling Americans depend upon. It's easy to take the simplistic view and look at it as a frivolous expense, however, that would be rather short-sighted.

The benefits of the mission are already showing in a sparked interest in science, math and engineering - areas of study American youth tend to shy away from, and ones that are critical to the future prosperity of our country. The young children inspired by the rover's successes will be the same people our nation counts on to fulfill NASA's ambitions to land a human on the surface of Mars by 2035. If that goal comes to fruition, imagine all the technology advances that will come to light to make the mission possible.

The world will simply be a different place. One discovery will lead to the next, and soon iPhones and hybrid cars will be as outdated as rotary dial phones and the Ford Model T.

The possibilities are endless.