

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE

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May 9, 2006

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf
Chairman
Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice, Commerce
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
H-309 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Science, State, Justice, Commerce
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Mollohan:

Last December, President Bush signed the NASA Authorization Act of 2005 into law [P.L. 109-155]. That legislation directed the NASA Administrator to “*ensure that NASA carries out a balanced set of programs that shall include, at a minimum, programs in (A) human space flight..., (B) aeronautics research and development, and (C) scientific research.*” P.L 109-155 authorized \$17.9 billion for NASA in FY 2007, an amount consistent with the \$17.8 billion that the Administration had projected would be required for FY 2007 in the five-year budget plan for NASA that accompanied the announcement of the President’s exploration initiative two years ago.

Unfortunately, the Administration has failed to request funding for NASA in either FY 2006 or FY 2007 commensurate with what it has estimated would be needed. Thus, the FY 2007 budget request for NASA is more than a billion dollars less than the Administration and Congress (as reflected in the Authorization Act of 2005) have believed is required to undertake the new exploration initiative while maintaining robust and healthy science and aeronautics programs. We have been consistent in our stated position that we support the goals of the exploration initiative, but that we are not prepared to support an implementation approach for that initiative that is predicated on the cannibalization of NASA’s other important missions.

In our view, NASA's FY 2007 budget request makes unacceptable cuts to NASA's science and aeronautics programs, and it is inconsistent with the stated goals of the Administration's American Competitiveness Initiative. We believe that if those cuts are not reversed, long-term damage will be done to important national R&D capabilities. Moreover, an exploration initiative that is premised on the curtailment or diminution of other core NASA missions is not likely to prove politically sustainable over the long run.

It is clear that you face a significant challenge in attempting to construct a viable NASA appropriations plan within today's fiscally constrained environment. We are writing to you to offer our recommendations for addressing NASA's FY 2007 budget request based on the approach taken in the NASA Authorization Act of 2005 as well as on information obtained from this year's Science Committee hearing record.

Fundamentally, we believe that it is important for Congress to provide an overall funding level for NASA as close as possible to the \$17.8 billion level recommended in the NASA Authorization Act of 2005. Otherwise, as is demonstrated by NASA's FY 2007 budget request, ill-advised and damaging cuts to NASA's science and aeronautics programs, as well as to important long-term exploration research and technology efforts are inevitable.

We would propose that at a minimum the additional funding be applied to the following critical priorities that have been adversely impacted in the FY 2007 NASA budget request:

- Restoration of the funding cut from NASA's Research and Analysis (R&A) accounts, including that for Astrobiology. As was made clear at the recent Science Committee hearing on NASA's space and Earth science programs, R&A funding is very important in maintaining the health of university-based space and Earth science research, as well as helping to develop the next generation of researchers.
- Revitalization of NASA's small and medium-class Explorer program and Earth System Science Pathfinder mission lines, which also contribute greatly to the overall vitality of the space and Earth science enterprise, and which have been cut back significantly by NASA over the past few years.
- Continuation of a commitment to "flagship" science missions—while the frequency and scope of such missions will be constrained by overall availability of resources within NASA's space and Earth science program, it is important that the nation continue to invest in such missions as part of a balanced and productive overall science portfolio.
- Maintenance of the nation's capability for basic and applied life science and physical science microgravity research, as called for in Sec. 305 of the NASA Authorization Act of 2005. Such research has been decimated over the last several years as NASA has shifted funding to other priorities, and unless at least a minimum level of "keep-alive" funding is made available in FY 2007, the long-term damage to these fields may be irreversible.

- Revitalization of NASA's Aeronautics R&D program. Last year's appropriation and authorization legislation both stressed the importance of investing in NASA's aeronautics program, but NASA's FY 2007 budget request is directly counter to Congress's intent. While NASA's current restructuring of its aeronautics activities would leave the agency with a set of activities narrower than the robust aeronautics agenda envisioned in the NASA Authorization Act and thus may need to be revisited once the National Academies releases its Decadal Survey of Aeronautics R&D, it is clear that the funding level that NASA foresees providing for aeronautics R&D over the next five years is inadequate.

Ideally, the above-mentioned priorities will be funded by means of an augmentation to NASA's FY 2007 budget request. We believe that failure to provide the funds necessary to carry out a balanced program of R&D in science, aeronautics, and human space flight would call into question the wisdom of proceeding with the exploration initiative as currently conceived. Congress would be ill-advised to start down the road of making large investments in the hardware and systems needed for human exploration beyond low-Earth orbit—for which the magnitude of the required investment will increase dramatically in the period beyond the current five-year NASA budget plan—in the absence of a national consensus to provide the necessary resources.

It is our position that if it proves impossible to augment the FY 2007 budget request with additional funds, budgetary "offsets" should be made from the Exploration Systems budget to fund the above-mentioned priorities. In that regard, we believe that making progress on the development of new crewed and cargo systems to replace the Space Shuttle is a higher near-term priority than activities in support of human expeditions to the Moon and Mars. At the same time, we would not recommend augmenting funding for the Constellation program beyond the request level given the absence of well defined cost and schedule estimates at this point in the program. In any event, full funding of the Constellation program budget request should be dependent on first ensuring that the scientific and aeronautics priorities outlined above are adequately funded.

Sincerely,



BART GORDON
Ranking Member



MARK UDALL
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Space and
Aeronautics

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Jerry Lewis
The Honorable David R. Obey
The Honorable Sherwood Boehlert
The Honorable Ken Calvert

ATTACHMENT

Recommended Minimum Set of Changes to NASA FY 2007 Budget Request

Increases to Science, Aeronautics, and Education appropriations account:

- \$92 million to Research & Analysis (R&A) for restoration of R&A cuts (including to Astrobiology)
- \$90 million to funding for Explorer and Earth System Science Pathfinder programs
- \$19.7 million to Global Precipitation Mission (GPM)
- \$10 million to Terrestrial Planet Finder for long-term technology risk reduction activities
- \$15 million to Beyond Einstein probes for long-term technology risk reduction activities
- \$30 million to Space Interferometer Mission (SIM)
- \$20 million for Europa and Outer Planets mission planning and technology activities
- \$15 million for implementation of Sec. 313 of the NASA Authorization Act of 2005
- \$57.1 million restored to SOFIA project with stipulation that outyear operating costs incurred by U.S. need to be reduced
- \$176.2 million to Aeronautics R&D to restore to FY 06 appropriation level

Increases to Exploration Systems and Space Operations appropriations account:

- \$54.4 million for fundamental R&D in life sciences and physical microgravity sciences to be added to the \$15.6 million contained in the FY 2007 NASA budget request to comply with the intent of Sec. 305 of the NASA Authorization Act of 2005, exclusive of any funding for Multi-User Systems and Support (MUSS) to support the research program
- \$8 million to Commercial Orbital Transportation Services (COTS) to restore total funding available in FY 07 to the \$120 million level stipulated in the NASA request for proposals given to industry
- Maintain the funding for the Space Product Development/Research Partnership Centers programs at the FY 2007 request level and reject NASA's proposed termination of those programs [No additional funding beyond the FY 07 request level is needed]

TOTAL RECOMMENDED INCREASES= \$587.4 million