

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 25, 2008

The President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The recent incursion by Russia into the sovereign nation of Georgia, and its subsequent behavior, has raised concerns about the reliability of Russia as a partner for the International Space Station (ISS) and the related provision of crew delivery services to and from the International Space Station, including U.S. astronauts and researchers.

As you know, the ability of the United States to purchase transportation aboard Russian Soyuz launch vehicles for the purpose of sending U.S. crew members to the Space Station is currently permissible only through a waiver of the Iran, North Korea, and Syria Nonproliferation Act. This waiver expires at the end of calendar year 2011, and you have formally requested that the Congress extend that exemption. The Russian incursion into Georgia has raised new questions about the wisdom of providing that exemption. Any consideration of granting this waiver would reflect concern for the continued viability of the ISS, and the need to have a means for U.S. astronauts and scientific researchers to be able to make full use of this multi-billion dollar facility.

The only independent U.S. means for the transport of crew to the ISS is currently the Space Shuttle, slated for termination after completion of the space station assembly as part of the Vision for Space Exploration you announced in January 2004. We applauded and supported that initiative, and have continued to do so. We believe it was—and remains—the correct path for our nation's civil space program. However, Congress has stated concerns about the projected gap between the termination of the Space Shuttle and the availability of its successor launch and crew transportation vehicles, being developed by NASA under the Constellation Program. The 2005 NASA Authorization Act specifically made it the policy of the United States to have uninterrupted human spaceflight capability.

The decision to terminate the Shuttle upon completion of the ISS, planned for 2010, was primarily a means of enabling the development of new vehicles without a large upsurge in NASA's overall budget. Funds used to maintain and operate the Space Shuttle program could then be used for the development of the new vehicles. That decision certainly made sense from a

fiscal point of view, and making use of the Russian Soyuz vehicles as an expansion of the original partnership between the U.S., Russia and our other International partners was also seen to be of value. Our concern is that we do not have a guarantee that such cooperative and mutually beneficial activity will continue to be available, and the successful utilization of the ISS may thus be jeopardized.

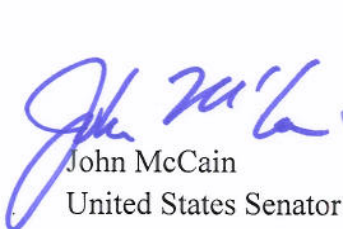
We continue to believe it is essential to both speed the availability of Ares I rocket and Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle, and to help spur the development of a robust commercial US spaceflight industry. The fact is, however, that neither of these efforts offers a clear near-term solution to ensure that U.S. astronauts and scientists are able to make use of the U.S. segment of the ISS—which has been designated as a National Laboratory.

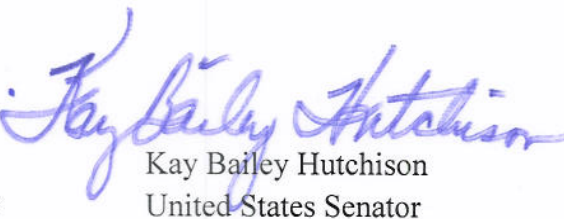
Given all of these considerations, we believe that it is imperative, as NASA continues the transition from the Space Shuttle to the successor vehicles, that the means for producing additional flight hardware and obtaining additional flight engineering and support services, not be completely and irretrievably lost through destruction or deterioration, at least until a clear path to alternative launch capabilities is in hand. At a minimum, we request that you direct NASA to take no action for at least one year from now that would preclude the extended use of the Space Shuttle beyond 2010. We understand that several such actions are pending in the near future, and believe that allowing them to continue would remove an option for U.S. human spaceflight capability that must not be irretrievably lost at this time.

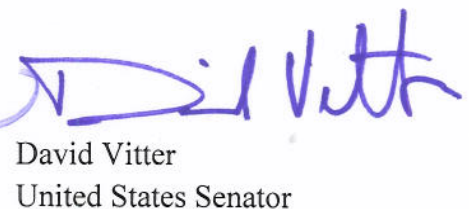
Earlier this year, the Senate Commerce Committee unanimously reported a NASA Authorization bill (S.3270) which included language directing the types of steps we are suggesting. The limited time available for consideration of legislation this year may not make it possible for that measure—or any variation of its content in another legislative vehicle—to be enacted during this session of Congress. But the message is clear that there is strong support in the Senate, and we believe in the House, for taking steps to ensure that the United States does not find itself without any means of utilizing the International Space Station during the crucial early years of its full operational life.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our views.

Sincerely,

  
John McCain  
United States Senator

  
Kay Bailey Hutchison  
United States Senator

  
David Vitter  
United States Senator