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January 21, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Penn. Ave.
Washington, D.C. 20502

Dear Mr. President:

As you make final changes to your FY 2011 budget request, I write to remind you what is at stake as our nation faces fierce competition in space exploration and a U.S. human space flight gap that continues to widen to six years or more. In my letter dated November 3, 2009, which I sent shortly after the U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee presented you with its final report, I stressed the importance that you “revise your budget plan and allocate sufficient funding to NASA human space flight in order to keep your commitment to close the gap and keep America first in space.” Your leadership is direly needed today to ensure that your stated objectives for our nation and our space program are realized.

On November 23, 2009, I joined 80 of my House colleagues in a bipartisan letter expressing our strong support for a FY 2011 budget that increases NASA funding levels “to ensure NASA has the resources needed to meet with the mission challenges of human space flight.” These Members of Congress, who represent millions of Americans in congressional districts from across the country, recognize that human space exploration benefits every American and is critical to our nation’s future international competitiveness. They join me in eagerly awaiting your proposal for the future.

Absent sufficient funding in your FY 2011 budget, NASA will end Space Shuttle flights at the conclusion of the Space Station assembly missions either late this year or in early 2011. At that point the United States will cede its leadership in space to other nations and lock itself into a sole reliance on the Russians to fly U.S. astronauts to the ISS until a new U.S. vehicle comes on line – a process that could take as many as six years.


The gap threatens to grow to six years or more if bold decisions are not made soon. As you weigh competing priorities and requests for the budget, please bear in mind that space is an exceptionally beneficial as well as an affordable investment. In addition to the obvious national security implications, space exploration generates high skilled jobs, creates countless inventions and spinoffs that improve our lives, and inspires upcoming generations to study science and math.

By investing just \$1.5 billion more per year we can reduce the gap by safely flying additional Shuttle flights, likely less considering the money saved by not paying the Russians to meet our

launch obligations. Arguably the most complex machine ever built, the Shuttle already undergoes a robust safety review before each and every launch.

In closing, I personally extend to you an invitation to attend the next Shuttle launch, currently planned for February 7, 2010. Shuttle Endeavour will deliver and attach the "Tranquility" Node to the international space station, adding to the station's life support and environmental control systems. The node includes a six-window cupola, which will offer stunning views of the earth and space and serve as an operating station for the station's robotic arm.

Sincerely,


Bill Posey
Member of Congress

Cc: NASA Administrator Bolden
OSTP Director Holdren