United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2025

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Van Hollen:

We respectfully request a recommitment to strong funding for NASA's Science Mission Directorate (SMD) in the Fiscal Year 2026 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. Specifically, we request that the Committee provide $9 billion for NASA's Science Mission Directorate and increase the overall NASA topline accordingly. NASA Science is a cornerstone of our nation's space program, and maintaining sufficient funding is essential to ensuring continued U.S. leadership in space exploration and safeguarding critical national security capabilities and workforce investments. Our space program is peerless, but risks falling behind if we abandon our commitment to NASA's Science programs.

America launched the first successful mission to Venus in 1962, the first to Mars in 1964, and has since been the first nation to reach every major planetary body in the solar system. Our space telescopes have revolutionized our understanding of the universe and inspired American students to pursue science and engineering as the STEM workers of the future. Our study of the Sun protects our critical communications, energy, and national security infrastructure. And studying the Earth provides a unique window to understanding and defending the one planet capable of supporting human life.

However, the United States and its allies are not alone in pursuing an ambitious space science program. China's capabilities continue to grow: they have landed a rover on Mars, returned samples from the far side of the Moon, and are pursuing an ambitious program of deep space exploration and scientific discovery.[1] The United States, not China, must be the first to land and return samples from Mars, discover signs of life on remote planets, and return humans to the lunar surface for the first time in more than half a century.

[1] "China to seek out life in the solar system as NASA faces cuts, commercial players expand ambitions," SpaceNews, https://spacenews.com/china-to-seek-out-life-in-the-solar-system-as-nasa-faces-cuts-commercial-players-expand-ambitions/

The Office of Management & Budget proposal to slash NASA science funding by 47% threatens not only our scientific leadership but also vital national security interests.[2] The ability to operate freely and effectively in space underpins terrestrial defense, global communications, navigation, and other technological capabilities. NASA-driven technological advancements in propulsion, remote sensing, and materials science directly enhance military readiness and economic resilience. And NASA-supported science missions provide training grounds for scientists, engineers, and technicians who will rise within the space industry, academia, or NASA itself, helping to power our space sector in an era of fierce global competition. The nation cannot afford to surrender space to China or any other country in the pursuit of short-term, nonstrategic budget cuts.

Notably, this budget proposal has been panned by current and former Republican leaders,[3] numerous Members of Congress of both parties,[4] and a broad coalition of commercial space associations, professional societies, and community organizations.[5] The Congress must stand with the space community in opposing these cuts and restoring full funding for NASA.

In an era of growing competition in space, investing in NASA science sends a clear message of continued U.S. leadership and commitment to our national legacy of bold exploration. The first nation to return humans for a sustained presence on the Moon, make the next era-defining technological advancements, and unravel the mysteries of the universe will set the norms in space and on Earth, charting humanity's future.

Furthermore, as a public agency, only NASA is responsible for and capable of pursuing ambitious, long-term exploratory science projects in the United States. Private and commercial space organizations, while demonstrating tremendous capabilities, have neither the financial capacity nor the social responsibility to pursue breakthrough science on the public's behalf. While we commend NASA for exploring new types of partnerships with commercial entities in space science, those same companies would lose their primary customer should proposed cuts come into effect, undercutting the emerging space economy.

Economically, NASA's science programs deliver substantial benefits nationwide. NASA investments generate technological innovations that create new industries and high-paying jobs across diverse sectors, including healthcare, telecommunications, advanced manufacturing, optics, and computing, let alone commercial space. In FY 2023 alone, NASA generated $75

---

[2] *Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request*, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Fiscal-Year-2026-Discretionary-Budget-Request.pdf

[3] Gingrich, N., Walker, B., Miller, C., "NASA Needs Rational Reforms, Not Reckless Cuts," *RealClearScience*, https://www.realclearscience.com/articles/2025/04/22/nasa_needs_rational_reforms_not_reckless_cuts_1105434.html

[4] "Planetary Science Caucus Co-Chairs Bacon & Chu Statement on White House's Proposed Budget Cuts to NASA Science," https://bacon.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2647

[5] "Science, industry, and advocacy groups unite in opposition to deep cuts to NASA science," *The Planetary Society*, https://www.planetary.org/press-releases/science-industry-and-advocacy-groups-unite-in-opposition-to-deep-cuts-to-nasa-science

billion in economic activity nationwide—a 3-to-1 return on investment—supporting more than 300,000 jobs directly and indirectly.[6] In some states, particularly those without legacy aerospace industries, this ROI is as much as 20-to-1. NASA is a powerhouse of economic growth, job creation, and involves every state in the union and almost every district in its pursuit.

A $9 billion budget for SMD would represent a 4.2% increase over the inflation-adjusted peak funding in FY 2020. After the backslide of the past 5 years due to inflationary and economic pressures, we must reinvest in, not retreat from, the programs that have unmistakable scientific, economic, and national security benefits. To ensure that the proposed $9 billion funding for the Science Mission Directorate does not come at the expense of other vital NASA programs, we recommend adjusting NASA's overall budget to reflect inflation and the expanding scope of its missions.

It is our responsibility to ensure NASA's science programs receive the funding necessary to maintain America's scientific preeminence and economic vitality, and to safeguard our national security and diplomatic leadership. We therefore respectfully urge the Committee to provide $9 billion for NASA's Science Mission Directorate in FY 2026.

We thank you for your consideration of this important request and look forward to working closely with you to ensure NASA receives the funding necessary to advance American leadership in space science and exploration.

Sincerely,

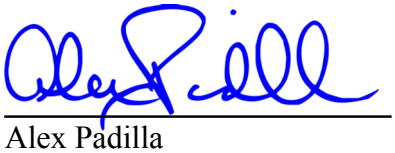
Mark Kelly
United States Senator

Adam B. Schiff
United States Senator

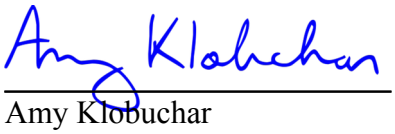
John Hickenlooper
United States Senator

Ben Ray Luján
United States Senator

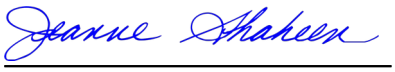
[6] *NASA Economic Impact Study for FY 2023*, https://www.nasa.gov/fy-2023-economic-impact-report/



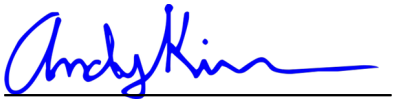
Alex Padilla
United States Senator



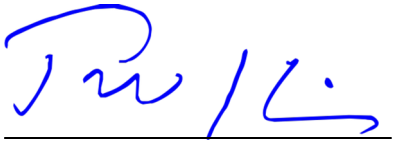
Amy Klobuchar
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

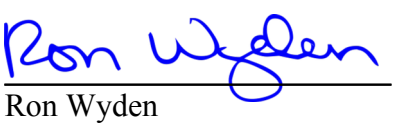


Andy Kim
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator

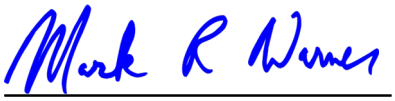
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



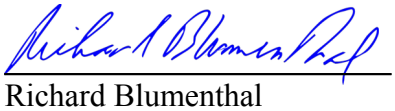
Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator

Tammy Duckworth
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

Commerce, Justice and Science Group Letter Table
CJS_Kelly_Group_250522-021601[LetterID 22041]

ID	Sub	Request Agency or Account	Request Project Name	Request ($000)
192613	CJS Group	[Title III]/[Science]/[National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)]/[Science]/[Science Top Line] **[Member Staff]** - Sydney Hess sydney_hess@kelly.senate.gov 202-224-4571	NASA Science Mission Directorate	$9,000,000
192614	CJS Group	[Title III]/[Science]/[National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)]/[NASA Top Line] **[Member Staff]** - Sydney Hess sydney_hess@kelly.senate.gov 202-224-4571	NASA Top Line **[Member's Request (text)]** - Increase the Overall NASA Topline	$0