



PLANETARY SCIENCE INSTITUTE ENDORSEMENT FOR THE NASA AUTHORIZATION BILL FOR 2016 AND 2017

April 30, 2015

The Planetary Science Institute deeply appreciates the continuing support by the House of Representatives for the US Solar System exploration program, and endorses that section of the proposed NASA Authorization Act for 2016 and 2017. We note its continuing support for “a balanced and adequately funded set of activities, consisting of research and analysis grants programs, technology development, small, medium, and large space missions, and suborbital research activities” and its support for the recommendations of the planetary decadal survey. However, the lack of adequate funding currently does not allow for a balanced program. In particular, the clear priorities of the decadal survey for dealing with budget shortfall scenarios have been ignored with continuing negative consequences especially to the (small mission) Discovery program - the backbone of US solar system exploration since the mid- 1990s. Calls for the restoration of that program by Congress are of great value. We also appreciate continued support expressed for the planetary research programs, a top priority of the decadal survey under all fiscal scenarios. These programs are essential for the maintenance of US planetary science capability, our ability to define new cost-effective missions, and the means by which we gain maximum return on taxpayer investment from our nation's past and ongoing missions.

This bill reiterates long-standing concerns expressed by Congress regarding the threats posed by near-Earth objects, and supports the continuing effort to assess those threats by achieving the goals of the Near-Earth Object Survey program. It calls upon the Administration to “seek to leverage the capabilities of the private sector and philanthropic organizations to the maximum extent practicable” in carrying out this program. It is our position that this is best achieved through open competition that engages these communities and brings to bear the best talents of this nation.

This bill also calls on the Administration to engage the National Academies to “develop a science strategy for astrobiology” and to assess “the Administration’s revised post-2016 Mars exploration architecture,” its long-term goals, and its ability to optimize the science return. This is all timely given the fiscal constraints that continue to face the US solar system exploration program. It is the position of the Planetary Science Institute that such reports would benefit from the broadest possible engagement of the planetary community.

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