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November 3, 2009



The Honorable Alan Mollohan
Chairman
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Commerce, Justice and Science
Room H-130 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Wolf
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee
on Commerce, Justice and Science
1016 Longworth H.O.B.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan and Ranking Member Wolf:

As you well know, the future of America's human space flight program is at a crossroads. Today, America's leadership in space is respected universally throughout the world but the future of that coveted status is at stake. The much anticipated final report of the U.S. Human Space Flight Plans Committee (Augustine Committee) has reiterated what we already knew: recent and current funding trends are insufficient for the United States to close the human space gap between the Shuttle retirement and its successor, Constellation, and to keep America first in space. The President unequivocally committed to fulfilling both of these objectives last fall. Our failure to provide the necessary spending for this program will cede U.S. leadership in space to the Russians, Chinese and others who are nipping at our heels.

Based both on the frequency of past Shuttle flights and on the currently remaining manifest schedule, it is becoming more apparent that Shuttle flights will need to be extended into 2011 just to complete the current manifest. As such, I write you to request that funding be appropriated to ensure a seamless continuity of Shuttle operations into 2011 toward two ends. First, the current Shuttle manifest must be completed in a manner than does not bring pressures to bear that may compromise safety. Second, the option must remain to keep flying the Shuttle beyond the current manifest.

The just-released Augustine Committee report reiterated what Chairman Augustine has said before, "the only way to eliminate or significantly reduce the gap in human space flight launch capability is by extending the Shuttle Program." Time is of the essence as with each passing day we further debilitate the chain of production that keeps the finest human-rated heavy lift vehicle on earth flying until a successor to the Shuttle comes online.

I would ask the committee to include language in the final FY 2010 Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations bill that requires NASA to terminate or suspend any activity that, if continued, would preclude or significantly impair the continued safe and effective

flight of the Space Shuttle beyond 2010. The language should be sufficient to ensure that the agency takes no actions that would preclude the possibility of flying the Shuttle beyond the current flight manifest. I would ask the Committee to include sufficient funding to ensure that NASA is able to continue all of its operations while also keeping the Shuttle infrastructure in place so that we retain the option of flying the Shuttle through at least a portion of the human space flight gap.

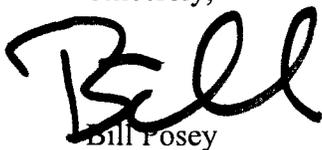
The report affirms that the annual cost of continuing to operate the Shuttle is significantly less than most have assumed. The report makes clear that “savings resulting from Shuttle retirement are not as great as they may appear. Conversely, the marginal costs of flying the Shuttle are less than implied by existing bookkeeping.” The report observes that while the annual Shuttle budget is approximately \$3 billion per year, about \$1.5 billion of that is devoted to fixed costs, costs that NASA will incur whether they continue to fly the Shuttle or retire the Shuttle.

The Committee adds that the Shuttle will need to be recertified. However, the highly skilled men and women who keep the Shuttle flying safely are required to perform such safety certifications each time the Shuttle flies. A full recertification could be readily accomplished by the workforce. The report also notes that “flying into space is inherently risky” and while “future vehicles will carry less risk than the Shuttle, the Shuttle has reached a level of maturity that those [new] launch vehicles will not reach for many years. (Those vehicles have their ‘infant mortality’ phase ahead of them.)” The reliability of the Shuttle should not be discounted.

Further savings of hundreds of millions of dollars per year would be achieved by not being forced to pay the Russians to fly U.S. astronauts to the International Space Station, by avoiding non-safety-related upgrades to the Shuttle, and by perhaps retiring one of the Shuttle orbiters. The marginal cost of continuing to operate the Shuttle is only a fraction of the \$3 billion that is often incorrectly assumed.

During this time of uncertainty and in light of the Augustine Committee’s clear indication that Shuttle extension is integral to closing the gap, this request is quite reasonable. I appreciate your consideration of this request. I look forward to working with you to support a robust budget for our nation’s human space flight program, closing the human space flight gap and keeping America first in space.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Posey". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Bill Posey
Member of Congress