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March 30, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I understand you will visit Kennedy Space Center on April 15, 2010, presumably to provide details on your vision and plan for America's human space flight program. My office has not yet received an invitation, agenda, or any other preliminary information on this event. I write to inform you that I would very much appreciate the opportunity to participate in the event with you.

As I am sure you know from news reports, correspondence with Members of Congress, and by conferring with NASA Administrator Bolden, the Administration's NASA budget proposal has raised serious concerns with lawmakers, the space work force, and the American public. Many are gravely concerned that we will cede our leadership in space to competing nations and place our national security at risk.

On March 4, 2010 the entire Florida Congressional delegation joined me in sending you a letter expressing our concerns on behalf of the people we represent across the State of Florida. The letter asks for details on a number of vital matters proposed in your budget request, including the future of Kennedy Space Center, Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, and the State of Florida in general serving as our nation's premiere space port. As Florida's unemployment rate hits a record 12.2 percent, I reiterate that letter's concerns regarding the high-skilled space workforce, which faces a tragic repeat of the Apollo-era layoffs. I would ask that you address these questions prior to your April 15 visit, as every passing day injects more uncertainty into the future of our coveted space program.

In August of 2008, you visited Brevard Community College and pledged:

"One of the areas where we are in danger of losing our competitive edge is in science and technology, and nothing symbolizes that more than our space program....Let me be clear, we can not cede our leadership in space. That is why I'm going to close the space gap [and] ensure that our space program doesn't suffer when the Shuttle goes out of service....by continuing to support NASA funding, by speeding the development of the shuttle successor."

At that time the vision you outlined was well received and deservedly so. Today we are rapidly approaching the time of scheduled Shuttle retirement, the length of the originally proposed human space flight gap has widened, and Floridians and the nation are looking to you to fulfill the promises you made to close the space gap and keep the United States first in space.

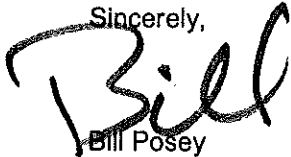
More recently, however, your Administration's budget request has taken the opposite approach by retiring the Space Shuttle and making the gap indefinite by terminating the Constellation program (and not proposing an alternative successor). This approach to our mission in space would be devastating, leaving us with no domestic means of getting our own astronauts into low earth orbit (LEO) and no prospect of continuing human space exploration to the moon and beyond. Should we maintain this course, we will fall permanently behind competing nations, such as China and Russia, which will press forward with manned missions to the moon and eventually to Mars. Such a scenario is not in our nation's security or economic interest.

Any serious plan to keep us first in space must involve extending the life of the Shuttle beyond 2011. NASA already faces challenges in launching the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer (AMS) within the parameters outlined by NASA in the budget. Additionally, we have an external tank that is completely available for use and could easily be added to the manifest as well as parts of other external tanks that are in various stages of development. The Augustine Panel recently affirmed that the Shuttle is a robust vehicle, which is more than able to meet our nation's space demands for the next several years until a successor is closer to coming online. Ideally, we will have a seamless transition from Shuttle to a successor with the ability of NASA to launch our own astronauts into LEO and beyond. I am joined by House and Senate colleagues from both parties in calling for a reasonable, affordable, and safe extension of Shuttle flights by spreading out manifests at two flights per year. For around one percent of stimulus money, we can fly the Shuttle for five years.

At a time when our economy is suffering and many jobs have been moved overseas, NASA is one of the greatest sources of highly skilled jobs in the United States, resulting in over 40,000 jobs in Florida alone and many tens of thousands more across the country. In recent testimony before the House Financial Services Committee, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke emphasized that long-term unemployment of highly specialized workers has a serious negative impact on their future employment and our economy. This is what we are talking about with regard to our nation's space workers. Our nation got it wrong when it ended the Apollo program and we cannot afford to repeat those past mistakes. We need a softer landing and a smoother transition.

Again, I welcome the opportunity to discuss all of these concerns with you at the April space summit. America's mission in space is one that enjoys tremendous bipartisan support and I look forward to working with you to keep our space program vibrant, our workers employed, and our nation secure.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping "B" and a cursive "ill".

Bill Posey
Member of Congress