

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE

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April 12, 2002

The Honorable James T. Walsh, Chairman
The Honorable Alan B. Mollohan, Ranking Minority Member
Subcommittee on VA, HUD & Independent Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Walsh and Ranking Minority Member Mollohan:

Given the potential disparity in the Science Committee's schedule for completing work on a NASA authorization bill and your subcommittee's schedule for the VA-HUD-Independent Agencies appropriations bill, I would like to identify an issue related to the fiscal year 2003 funding for NASA that I believe needs to be addressed in both pieces of legislation. Specifically, I believe that it is important for the VA-HUD-IA subcommittee to include additional funding above the Administration's request for the International Space Station and its associated research accounts. In addition language should be included clarifying Congress's intent that NASA complete the International Space Station in a manner that restores the full seven-person crew capability and satisfies U.S. commitments under the international agreements governing the program.

In making these recommendations, I in no way minimize the need to ensure that taxpayer funds are spent responsibly and efficiently. While recognizing the factors that have contributed to cost growth in the International Space Station program, I support appropriate and sensible measures to gain greater confidence in the estimates of the remaining costs of the program and to ensure that appropriate financial controls are maintained.

Nevertheless, efforts to review the financial management of the program should not put the Space Station program in "limbo" for two or more years. It is imperative that sufficient additional funds be provided to NASA in fiscal year 2003 to ensure that work continues on those systems needed for a seven-person crew capability, including at a minimum environmental control and life support, habitation facilities and outfitting, and a U.S. Crew Return Vehicle. In addition, while I understand that NASA has been directed to undertake yet another review of its Space Station research program, that review has been driven in large part by the billion dollar cut made by OMB to the research budget. Whatever priorities are identified by the current research task force, it is clear that funding will need to be restored to the Space Station research accounts if the U.S. is to have the capabilities needed to make the Space Station a productive research facility.

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Finally, while the Iran Nonproliferation Act would appear to preclude arrangements involving the use of taxpayer funds for the purchase of Soyuz vehicles or taxi services, there have been reports that the Administration is exploring such arrangements. It is my belief that if there proves to be no legal impediment to such arrangements, the use of taxpayer funds should only be provided until such time as a U.S. Crew Return Vehicle is available, and should be contingent on an agreement that any extra seats on the Soyuz vehicles be reserved for U.S. or International Partner scientific research personnel. Such a provision would be a small step towards redressing the devastating impact of the Space Station research funding cuts.

I want to thank you for all your past help. I recognize that this will be another tough year, but I hope you will be able to provide the resources needed to maintain a first-class space program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph M. Hall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

RALPH M. HALL
Ranking Democratic Member