THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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Doubling and Tripling What We Can Accomplish in Space

By Phil Larson, a Communications and Space Policy Analyst at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy

Thank you for signing this petition. We share your view that NASA is a driver of innovation and economic growth, a creator of high-skilled and high-paying jobs, and a force for inspiration in the American people -- especially our youth. That's why President Obama has set NASA on course for a new and exciting chapter of American space exploration, one that will see more discoveries, scientific breakthroughs, and, ultimately, more Americans in space going to places never before visited.

Even in the face of tough fiscal challenges, the President's plan charts a path towards continued American leadership in space by making every penny count. By investing in American companies -- and American ingenuity -- we are spurring free-market competition to give taxpayers more bang for the buck, while enabling NASA to do what it does best -- reach for the heavens.

Just this past month, an historic -- and audacious -- event took place. For the first time, a privately owned American spacecraft launched and docked with the International Space Station (ISS) to deliver the cargo American astronauts need to do their jobs in space. This fundamentally new way of doing business for NASA includes partnering with innovative U.S. companies like SpaceX to embrace the efficiency, ingenuity, and resources of the private sector while allowing NASA to focus on challenges only its world-class scientists and engineers have the ability to tackle -- like sending humans beyond low Earth orbit for the first time in 40 years, outside the Earth-Moon system for the first time in history, and ultimately to explore Mars within the next couple of decades.

NASA and space are so important to our future that we do need to be doubling and tripling what we can accomplish in this domain. That's why the President's plan for NASA more than doubles the number of U.S. rockets capable of going to the ISS. And the James Webb Space Telescope, which the President's Budget keeps on track for launch later this decade, won't just double Hubble's capabilities, but will be 100 times more powerful. This summer, Americans in a control room in California will be monitoring as an automobile-sized rover is lowered onto the Martian surface from a sky-crane hovering in the rusty atmosphere. The "Curiosity" Mars rover isn't just double the size of any previous rover -- but is also carrying 10 times the mass of scientific instruments as America's Opportunity rover currently operating on the surface. And with NASA's Kepler telescope currently in space, the number of planets identified as orbiting distant stars in other Solar Systems has not just been doubled, but multiplied several times over.

The Administration has worked with Congress over the last three years to develop a forward-leaning trajectory for NASA that places the agency on a more stable fiscal footing -- in part by joining forces with the private sector -- while still pushing the boundaries of inspiration and discovery. The key features of this plan include:

- Extending operations of the ISS -- which has been continuously crewed since 2000 -- until at least 2020 (when President Obama came into office, it was scheduled to be decommissioned after 2015);
- Acquiring crew and cargo transportation services to the ISS from U.S. commercial companies;
- Pursuing new technology investments, like advanced in-space propulsion, to expand the reach, affordability, and potential of our space science and exploration efforts -- technologies that are required to send humans beyond the Moon;
- Building the biggest, most powerful rocket ever -- set to be more powerful than the Saturn V vehicle that carried American astronauts to the Moon -- and cutting-edge crew capsule for deep space human exploration, including a mission to visit an asteroid in the 2020s and eventually Mars;
- Leading the world in Earth and space science research vital to understanding our planetary home and unlocking the mysteries of our Solar System and the Universe.

Unfortunately, not everyone is supportive of this ambitious effort. Rather than making bold, targeted investments in our space future and embarking on new partnerships with the private sector to ensure every taxpayer dollar is spent wisely, the proposed Republican House budget plan, if spread evenly, would significantly cut NASA's budget, forcing the deepest cuts to the space program since just after we landed on the Moon.

Even in today's tight fiscal environment, the Administration has proposed a NASA budget for FY 2013 that spares the agency from such cuts and yet will deliver more than ever from this essential driver of American innovation.

Thank you for signing this petition and showing interest in our Nation's space program -- an interest key to sustaining support for programs at NASA and one we could not share more strongly. We encourage you to continue demanding more from our most creative science and technology agencies, and to appreciate that it is not just about how many dollars are spent on such lofty missions, but how effectively that money is spent to deliver results for the American people. We think NASA has never been stronger.

Tell us what you think about this response and We the People.

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