



May 19, 2013

John M. Grunsfeld, Ph.D.,
Associate Administrator,
Science Mission Directorate
National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Dear Dr. Grunsfeld,

I am aware of the NASA FY13 Operating Plan being prepared for submission to Congress. I was provided information about this plan, the SMD Planetary Division portion of which I summarized in a special report of the Planetary Exploration Newsletter (May 15, 2013), excerpted below. I can understand the consternation caused by the release of otherwise embargoed information. However, part of the problem is with the fact that the information does not stand up well to public scrutiny. Reducing the planetary budget by more than 15% from that signed into law certainly shows a lack of respect for Congressional intent. Special treatment is given to new Europa studies by decreasing current funding levels for foundational programs such as research and competed missions. Such reallocation is not required by the law (*i.e.*, Section 505). Their implementation in the final four months of the fiscal year amplifies the damage. In sum, these contemplated actions are harmful to our nation's solar system exploration program.

I hope you will reconsider the details of the Planetary Division budget in the draft Operating Plan and will consider a modification of the Op Plan that better reflects the FY13 appropriations bill signed into law. I respectfully request a reconsideration of the draconian level of rescission and sequestration that has been applied to the Planetary Division budget and request that such cuts be limited to no more than 8%. Program lines should not be reduced below their current levels (reflected in the President's FY13 budget proposal under which the Agency has been operating). Of course, I recognize that this may not occur in the case of some missions, given the timing of some expenses, but the principle remains. I respectfully request that only the funds above the President's requested levels be used for those projects Congress intended to augment with those additional funds. Finally, the Op Plan should reflect the clear priorities articulated in the recent NRC Planetary Decadal Survey in the event of lower than expected funding levels: research programs should be stable and slowly growing (arguably the top priority), and the cadence of Discovery missions improved.

Your consideration of these issues is very much appreciated,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark V. Sykes".

Mark V. Sykes, Ph.D., J.D.,
CEO and Director
Planetary Science Institute

Excerpt from

SPECIAL REPORT AND ANALYSIS
PLANETARY EXPLORATION NEWSLETTER (May 15, 2013)
<http://planetarynews.org>

A summary of the Operating Plan and its effects are given in the table below. Each row corresponds to a budget line given in the FY13 budget bill passed by Congress on March 21. Lunar Quest and Technology were not specifically called out (hence the brackets).

FY13P = President's proposed budget for fiscal 2013 (the breakdown of Outer Planets in the President's FY13 budget proposal is inferred from information in the proposed Operating Plan). This is the budget under which NASA Planetary Science has been operating since October 1, 2012.

OP = Operating Plan for fiscal 2013, with rescission and sequestration applied, to be submitted to Congress

Delta = OP - FY13P

Cong = Appropriated budget signed into law (without rescission and sequestration)

%Cong = Percentage change in appropriated budget proposed by NASA Operating Plan including rescission and sequestration

Note: All numbers are in \$millions. At this point, I expect only small adjustments prior to the submission of the Operating Plan to Congress. My apology for any scrivener's errors.

Note: DELTA IS PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT, because it indicates the amount of funding being removed or added to the current budget by the operating plan. A negative indicates funding that must be removed from a program over the next four months (the end of the current fiscal year).

Note: I understand that the apparent MAVEN reduction is not a cut. It reflects the timing of expenses. These funds continue to be book-kept within Mars exploration with little change to the overall current budget level - though Congress directed a major increase, which has been removed.

	FY13P	OP	Delta	Cong	%Cong
PLANETARY SCIENCE	1192.3	1196.0	+3.7	1415.0	-15.5
Planetary Science Research	188.5	174.5	-14.0	192.0	-9.1
Discovery	189.6	162.9	-26.7	244.0	-33.2
New Frontiers	175.0	162.7	-12.3	175.0	-7.0
Mars Exploration	360.8	357.6	-3.2	450.8	-20.7
- MAVEN	146.4	127.4	-19.0	146.4	-13.0
- MSL	65.0	63.8	-1.2	65.0	-1.8
- Other Mars Activities	149.4	166.4	+17.0	239.4	-30.5
Outer Planets	84.0	147.8	+63.8	159.0	-7.0
- Europa (OP Flagship)	[3.0]	69.7	+66.7	75.0	-7.1
- [Other OP Activities]	[81.0]	78.1	-2.9		
[Lunar Quest]	61.5	67.0	+5.5		
[Technology]	132.9	123.4	-9.5		