



May 19, 2013

Senator Richard C. Shelby
Vice-Chair, Committee on Appropriations
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations

Dear Senator Shelby,

NASA is preparing its FY13 Operating Plan 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) and reproduced 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 and is frankly disdainful of Congressional intent.

The President, in his FY13 budget request, had reduced the NASA Planetary Division budget by more than 20%, from \$1.5B in FY12 to less than \$1.2B in FY13. Congress had restored more than \$220M to this request. The draft Op Plan removes all but \$3M of what Congress restored, using sequestration and rescission. This cut exceeds 15% of the budget signed into law. Special treatment is also given to new Europa studies, over other areas identified by Congress for increased funding. However, this is accomplished by decreasing current funding levels for foundational programs such as research and the competed Discovery program. Such reallocations are not required by the law (Section 505), and damage is amplified by the absorption of these cuts in the last four months of the fiscal year. In sum, these contemplated actions are harmful to our nation's solar system exploration program.

I hope you will communicate with NASA Administrator Bolden and request that NASA modify its Op Plan to better reflect the FY13 appropriations bill signed into law. NASA must reconsider the draconian level of rescission and sequestration that has been applied to the Planetary Division budget. It should not exceed 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 help is very much appreciated,

Sincerely,

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		