

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 20, 2024

The Honorable Bill Nelson  
Administrator  
NASA Headquarters  
300 E. Street SW  
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Administrator Nelson,

In the Fiscal Year 2024 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies appropriations bill, Congress clearly indicated its support of the Mars Sample Return (MSR) mission and its support of the Decadal Survey process. The final language reiterates the ranking by the science community that MSR and our quest to be the first nation to launch samples from another planet should be the highest priority item in the Planetary Sciences division. Accordingly, NASA should commit sufficient resources—at least \$650 million—within the range provided to ensure a successful and expeditious launch can occur at the soonest possible timeframe.

The bicameral and bipartisan consensus of Congress is to strongly support the mission and the importance of NASA expeditiously committing to a new architecture that ensures a timely launch to recover the samples. This is consistent with the Independent Review Board (IRB) assessment of the MSR Program's implementation plan and management approach, which reaffirmed the Decadal Survey recommendation that MSR should be a national space exploration priority, given its scientific and strategic importance.

As detailed in the final report, we remain alarmed at the lack of consultation with some Members of Congress about NASA's decision to move forward with workforce reductions before a fiscal year 2024 bill was enacted. The law and its accompanying report ultimately provided unambiguous support for the mission that would have precluded NASA's premature actions leading to significant layoffs. NASA should not engage in further workforce reductions. If NASA continues to delay its confirmation of a new plan, it will further jeopardize international partner commitments, lead to unnecessary risk and cost increases, hand China an advantage in the race to return samples, and potentially further strain the industry and NASA center talent availability.

NASA must uphold its commitment to the Planetary Sciences Decadal as a way to independently prioritize missions and respect Congress's clear intention for MSR to succeed. If NASA continues to put forward insufficient funding necessitating any further reductions in staff

downstream and unnecessary delays to the mission, it risks compromising our national leadership with respect to solar system exploration, compromising our future human missions to Mars, compromising our scientific community's process for providing independent advice and recommendations to the federal government, and undermining the intent of Congress. Therefore, we strongly urge you to submit an FY 2024 operating plan that funds MSR at no less than \$650 million. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



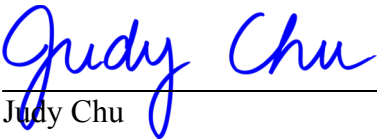
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Mike Garcia  
Member of Congress



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Adam B. Schiff  
Member of Congress



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Judy Chu  
Member of Congress



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Katie Porter  
Member of Congress



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Grace F. Napolitano  
Member of Congress



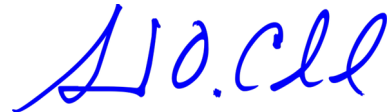
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Barbara Lee  
Member of Congress



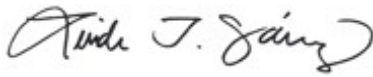
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Kevin Mullin  
Member of Congress



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Salud Carbajal  
Member of Congress



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Linda T. Sánchez  
Member of Congress



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Sydney Kamlager-Dove  
Member of Congress



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Nanette Diaz Barragán  
Member of Congress



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Pete Aguilar  
Member of Congress



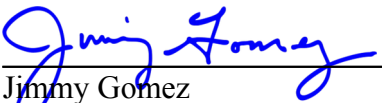
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Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



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Ro Khanna  
Member of Congress



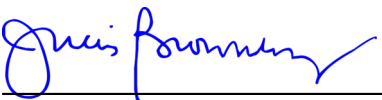
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Jimmy Gomez  
Member of Congress



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Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress



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Julia Brownley  
Member of Congress



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Tony Cárdenas  
Member of Congress



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Ami Bera, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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Norma J. Torres  
Member of Congress



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Robert Garcia  
Member of Congress



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Raul Ruiz, M.D.  
Member of Congress



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J. Luis Correa  
Member of Congress