



May 5, 2006

Honorable Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

As the members of the California Research Universities Network (CRUN), we are writing to urge you to support a balanced science program within the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which includes robust funding levels for the Explorer Program.

NASA's scientific successes and discoveries depend upon a well-balanced mission portfolio of large, medium, and small-sized missions. Universities such as ours play a role in each of these arenas, and we are concerned that NASA is jeopardizing this balance by underfunding and eliminating missions, in which California institutions and industry play a leading role, within the Explorer program, which represents one of NASA's best examples of small- to medium-sized-class missions.

The Explorer Program is a competitively run program that engages academia, industry, other government agencies and laboratories, and international partners, and is one of NASA's most successful programs addressing critical scientific questions across broad ranges of astronomy. It has produced widely publicized results. This program is also one in which California has been extremely successful in the past, with principal investigators from California leading ten out of the last twenty-five missions and co-investigators from California on twenty-one of these missions.

Eliminating these missions for non-technical or short-term budgetary reasons sends a disturbing message to the community and severely undermines the peer-review system and the importance of the NASA-university partnership which drives many of the nation's best discoveries. Participants invest heavily in putting forth highly competitive scientific proposals with cutting-edge technologies and rely upon NASA to honor its commitments to the process. By cutting the program or suspending funding on selected missions already years into development, NASA undercuts the significant investment that has been made by the taxpayer, industry, and academia. Moreover, the Explorer Program serves as a key avenue through which much of the technical workforce serving in industry is trained and receives needed experience.

While we understand that NASA is faced with difficult budgetary decisions, it is important that NASA maintains a balance within its science mission and not lose the successful smaller programs.

We urge you to fund this critical program at robust levels and identify other ways to manage growth in the program without cutting off funding for the highly successful Explorer Program.

Sincerely,



David Baltimore  
President  
California Institute of Technology



Steven B. Sample  
President  
University of Southern California



Robert C. Dynes  
President  
University of California



John L. Hennessy  
President  
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