Action Alerts

Action alert!

This week we are asking each AAS/DPS member to write letters and make phone calls to your representatives in order to advocate for planetary science.

Why now?

- The President’s fully detailed Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2018 is planned for release in May, and initial guidelines indicate that dramatic cuts in discretionary, non-defense areas such as science are in store across the government.
- The President’s “skinny budget” just released generously increases Planetary Science to $1.9B! However, Earth Science at NASA is affected disproportionately. NASA’s overall budget request is 0.8% lower than the FY17 expectation for a continuing resolution, and the NSF is generally facing a 10% cut.
- The House and Senate still haven’t passed a FY17 science appropriations bill and we want them to know where we stand. The House Commerce Justice and Science subcommittee will be introducing the funding bill for a vote soon.
- With numerous other policy issues dominating the political landscape, we are trying to remain above the noise and leverage the attention of Congressional staff who favor NASA science funding. Recall that the President proposes, but Congress disposes.
- Science advocacy is broadly important for us to all engage in, now more than ever, and responding to this action alert provides a focused, proven-effective means to have your concerns heard by decision makers.

Why should you participate?

- Constituents matter to Members of Congress! Letters and especially calls from constituents force staffers to sit up and take notice of an issue. If a number of letters and calls come in at once from constituents, it has an even greater impact.
- Even if your elected official is not on one of the following committees: [1], [2], [3], they still vote on bills and have influence with their colleagues. Often it is the congressional Member without a NASA center or other large vested interest in their district who needs the most education and convincing on space-related topics.
- We have had success in garnering Congressional support for planetary science, and we need to maintain and build on that momentum.

It is important to get as many people to contact as many Members of Congress as possible, so please participate! We encourage you to use social media to promote this call to action to help amplify the message and encourage others to act (use Twitter hashtag #FundPlanetary). Here’s what we’re asking you to do this week:

Letters
The letter template below provides a clear, disciplined message that is consistent with the messages DPS has been pushing in our overall advocacy campaign.

- Do customize your communications! In particular, stories about your own scientific work, the interactions with your students, and public outreach are compelling to Congressional offices. Keep it short and concise. Tailor one or more paragraphs in the template.
- You will likely need to submit your letter through a form on your Members of Congress’s websites. And most members of Congress communicate through social media, so use those channels as well!

**Phone calls**

- After you have sent the emails, call each of the Congressional offices. Be polite and nice! The people who answer the phones work hard and tend to suffer a lot of abuse from angry constituents; when you’re nice, you get more carefully listened to. You can ask to speak to the staffer who handles science and space issues; in most cases, they will connect you and you can speak directly to that staffer or leave a voicemail.
  - Hello, my name is ________, and I am a constituent from _________. I am also a planetary scientist working at _______________. I’m calling to ask Representative/Senator ____________ to support NASA’s planetary science and solar system exploration programs. Congress has consistently supported planetary science in recent years, and I hope the field can rely on its continued support. I have sent a more detailed letter to your boss using your website; I hope your office has time read it. Thank you very much.
- Once you realize how painless this ~5 min process was, plan to call back and firm up your connection the following week. Or better yet, call weekly for each of the next 5 weeks to elaborate more on each of your favorite 5 topics listed in the letter.

**How do you know who to write to and call?**

- To find out who your Members of Congress are and get their phone numbers and websites, the AAS website has helpful search tool.
  - [http://aas.org/resources/contacting-congress](http://aas.org/resources/contacting-congress) [4]

An important final note: Be certain you understand your employer’s rules about such action. Federal employees, for example, must not conduct such activities using federal resources, i.e. you must participate using your personal time/email/phone number/electronic devices. No matter where you work, your Constitutional rights to petition your government are always valid; you can always participate in advocacy like this, but you may need to be careful about doing it on your own time and resources.

Thank you – we’re looking forward to a strong response to this call to action!

Dear [Representative/Senator] [Last name],

I am a constituent from [town where you live] and a planetary scientist working at [your institution]. I write to you to ask for your support in maintaining a healthy program of U.S. solar system exploration as you and your colleagues look ahead to the Fiscal Year 2018 budget. I am asking that you support an FY18 budget level of $1.9B for NASA's Planetary Science Division - the same as the President has just requested - in order to accomplish the goals set out in the National Research Council’s 2013 Vision and Voyages Decadal Survey. I am also requesting a commensurate increase for the entire NASA Science Mission Directorate so that the increase for planetary science does not come at the expense of the important goals set out by the decadal surveys for the astrophysics, heliophysics,
and earth science divisions. You may have seen some of the milestones and scientific advances that have been made by this highly successful government office in this area in recent months: [Choose which highlights you want to use, remove the others, and/or add your own]

- NASA’s Juno mission recently started its primary science mission in orbit about the planet Jupiter. Over the next couple of years, Juno is poised to shed light on the origin of the planets in our Solar System.
- All of New Horizons' Pluto observations have now been downlinked to Earth, and new discoveries continue to flow while it travels on to Kuiper Belt target (486958) 2014 MU69.
- Observations from NSF's Very Large Array have provided an unprecedented look at a previously unexplored region of Jupiter's atmosphere and revealed new information about Jupiter's atmospheric dynamics.
- The OSIRIS-REx spacecraft successfully launched from Cape Canaveral last September to begin its journey to a nearby asteroid. There it will collect a sample of this cosmic building block and return it for study here on the Earth.
- NSF's Large Synoptic Survey Telescope will survey the entire visible sky every few nights, which could catalog millions of asteroids and thousands of near-Earth objects.
- NASA’s Cassini spacecraft convincingly determined that Enceladus, an icy moon of Saturn, contains a global ocean of liquid water beneath its surface. Like Europa, this may be an ideal place to search for life.
- NASA's Kepler and Spitzer missions have detected and characterized nearly 5,000 exoplanets, including seven Earth-sized worlds in the TRAPPIST-1 system. These detections have revolutionized our understanding of planetary formation and the prevalence of habitable worlds.
- The Dawn mission has been orbiting and studying the dwarf planet Ceres, where it revealed vast deposits of carbonate salts, the solid residue from evaporation of salt-saturated water, indicative of recent geologic activity.
- When the James Webb Space Telescope is launched in 2018, planetary scientists will have a new, powerful tool for observing solar system targets.
- Recent orbital observations at Mars have revealed a possible source of liquid water near the Curiosity rover. NASA is now investigating the feasibility of using Curiosity to study flowing water on Mars for the first time.

Events like these reaffirm America’s pioneering role in planetary science and exploration. Furthermore, they capture the imagination of the public and inspire the next generation of scientists, engineers, and technologists. Vital partnerships between NASA and private industry ensure that we make full use of the latest technological innovations and advance scientific discoveries.

[Discussion of your scientific work, work with students, impact in your district/state]

We strive to maintain America’s leadership role in planetary science and exploration and NASA’s ability to support a vibrant science community. In general, Congress has consistently supported planetary science through funding for the Planetary Science Division and the Science Mission Directorate, and I want to thank you and your colleagues for that support. I hope you will continue that support by enacting a Fiscal Year 2018 budget in regular order for the Planetary Science Division at a level of $1.9B - the same as the President has just requested. This level of support will help ensure that we can meet the goals laid out in the National Research Council’s Decadal Survey report for Planetary Science. This includes the report’s recommendation that the Planetary Science Division maintain a balanced program of large, medium, and small missions across the solar system, research and analysis, and technology development. A similar 5% increase to NASA’s Science Mission Directorate budget to $5.9B for Fiscal year 2018 will further strengthen a well-balanced program across the disciplines.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

The DPS is a Division of the American Astronomical Society.

Send questions, comments, updates to DPS.Webmaster@aas.org
Send graduate school and REU program updates to DPS.EdUpdate@aas.org
END OF LETTER TEMPLATE

Previous AAS/DPS Action Alerts

- AAS/DPS Action Alert 2016 August 22

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Links: