

Message From The FRS Chair: Revised And Corrected Action Alert

Please see this updated Action Alert and text for your letters to Congress. The FRS Chair apologizes for using an older version of the text while reacting to the news of the day.

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 mid-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 just released "skinny budget" for FY18 generously increases Planetary Science to \$1.9B, while NASA's top line would be cut by 0.8%. NASA fares better in this budget than almost every other agency not related to national security and veterans. A top line number for the Science Mission Directorate is not given, and neither are totals for the Astrophysics and Heliophysics divisions, but a cut for Earth Science is specified. The National Science Foundation (NSF) is not shown as separate a line item, but it is potentially facing a 10% cut if one assumes an across-the-board cut for all the agencies in the budget line into which NSF has been aggregated.
- The House and Senate still haven't passed a full year FY17 science appropriations bill and we want them to know where we stand on targets for FY18. The current continuing resolution funds the government through April 28.
- 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 planetary 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: [House Committee on Science, Space, & Technology](#) [1], [House Committee on Appropriations](#) [2], [Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, & Transportation](#) [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 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](#) [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. I am also concerned about potential cuts to the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the President's budget since the recent "skinny budget" lumped NSF into an "other agency" line with a 10% cut. NSF supports critical research grants in the planetary sciences so I request that Congress appropriate at least \$8B for NSF in Fiscal Year 2018. 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 and NSF's ability to support a vibrant science community. In general, Congress has consistently supported planetary science, 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 NASA 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 commensurate increase to NASA's Science Mission Directorate budget for Fiscal year 2018 will further strengthen a well-balanced program across the disciplines. And at least \$8B for the National Science Foundation will help ensure our nation's scientific leadership while supporting critical planetary science research grants and facilities.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Town, State]

Footer

- [Reports](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [History](#)
- [Bylaws](#)
- [Giving](#)

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Links:

- [1] <https://science.house.gov/subcommittees/subcommittee-space-115th-congress>
- [2] <http://appropriations.house.gov/about/members/commercejusticescience.htm>
- [3] <https://www.commerce.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/scienceandspace>
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