

## Newsletter 19-20

Issue 19-20, May 23, 2019

+-----CONTENTS-----+

### 1. MESSAGE FROM THE AAS PRESIDENT AND DPS CHAIR: MOON - 2024?

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### MESSAGE FROM THE AAS PRESIDENT AND DPS CHAIR: MOON - 2024 ?

Vice-President Pence recently announced the Administration’s goal of returning US astronauts to the lunar surface by 2024. The NASA plan is nicknamed “Artemis.” Last week the Administration delivered to Congress [an amendment](#) [1] to its initially proposed fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget to reflect this ambitious new goal.

The budget amendment contained proposals to add a total of \$1.6 billion to NASA’s FY20 budget, offset by reductions to the Pell Grant program in the Department of Education. The amendment also contained a proposal to give the NASA Administrator the authority to transfer funds between appropriations accounts “...in the event that the Administrator determines that the transfers are necessary in support of establishment of a U.S. strategic presence on the Moon.”

### Our Concerns

The proposed reductions to the Pell Grant program are certainly a concern for

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any organization that cares about the training of current and future generations of researchers and educators in our disciplines. There will be fierce opposition in Congress to this proposed budgetary offset.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine has publicly stated on at least a couple of occasions that it doesn't make sense to cut science programs to achieve human exploration goals — mostly because Congress is opposed to such moves — and we take him at his word. However, this initial \$1.6 billion augmentation is only a down payment, and some outside experts have put the likely additional annual funding augmentation need closer to \$4-8 billion. While trimming science programs won't come close to filling such budgetary holes, the proposed transfer authority is an item for serious concern should push come to shove in achieving the 2024 goal. One reason for this concern is that such transfers and communications to Congress about them take place in the shadows, outside of the sunshine of the normal public Congressional appropriations process.

### Science Priorities

In addition to the Administration's already-proposed Lunar Discovery and Exploration Program (LDEP) — which the House Appropriations Committee appears to be on track to support — the new \$1.6 billion amendment allocates \$90 million to NASA's Science Mission Directorate (SMD) "for the purchase of commercial services to deliver a rover to...explore the Moon's polar regions in advance of a human mission."

Since the changes in civilian space policy to return to the Moon have occurred after the [last planetary science decadal survey](#) [2] in 2013 and that [survey's midterm assessment](#) [3] in 2018, there is not a community-wide consensus on where the Administration's

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proposed lunar science program would rank within the relative priorities for lunar science, let alone within the priorities for the overall planetary science enterprise. The primary new lunar mission prioritized by the 2013 planetary decadal was the Lunar Geophysical Network (recommended for inclusion in the fifth New Frontiers competition). The 2013 survey also reaffirmed the 2003 survey's Lunar South Pole-Aitken Basin Sample Return mission for the fifth New Frontiers competition since it wasn't selected in the fourth New Frontiers round.

The current astronomy and astrophysics decadal survey is likely to consider lunar far-side project proposals, and the upcoming planetary science decadal survey will certainly need to consider the changes to civil space policy and commercial spaceflight capabilities as they impact the survey committee's holistic approach to prioritizing lunar and planetary research. In the meantime the LDEP program within SMD appears to be doing an admirable job of finding synergies between efforts to kick-start a lunar commercial services industry and solid peer-reviewed science investigations and payloads, while adhering to science priorities described in the 2013 planetary decadal survey.

### What Are the AAS and DPS Doing?

We have decided against taking an official position on NASA's Artemis proposal at this time. It is still very early, and we do not think that the benefits of public opposition to an ill-defined and untested proposal outweigh the use of political capital, at least not yet. We are clearly opposed to the Pell Grant offset on principle, and we have serious concerns about the proposed transfer authority and the as-yet undefined scientific content of the proposed crewed Artemis lunar program. The House Appropriations Committee responsible for NASA is working toward a 7% increase for NSF and a 4% increase for NASA SMD in FY20, which is a reassuring

sign of their continued strong support for space sciences.

We will, however, have the AAS public-policy staff informally present our concerns — Pell Grant offset, transfer authority, and lack of community consensus on the science program — to relevant Congressional and Executive Branch staff. A Congressional Hill visit by the AAS Division for Planetary Sciences (DPS) Committee on May 10th preemptively delivered the core of this message, which was well received. If evolving circumstances require the AAS to take a strong public position for or against what NASA proposes or does, we will not hesitate to do so.

As always, we welcome your comments and/or concerns about the AAS and DPS approach to advocating on your behalf.

Megan Donahue  
AAS President

Linda Spilker  
DPS Chair

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Send submissions to:

Anne Verbiscer, DPS Secretary ([dpssec@aaas.org](mailto:dpssec@aaas.org) [4])

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## Footer

- [Reports](#)
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- [Bylaws](#)
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