June 2, 2017

The Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) and its 341 member companies – which together create over $300 billion in economic value annually for America - are writing to request your support for additional funding for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in Fiscal Year 2018. We appreciate Congress’s action to increase NASA’s and NOAA’s FY 2017 appropriation and we urge your continued support. We believe it is essential that NOAA’s life-saving satellite programs receive at least the same funding as enacted for FY 2017, $2.35 billion, while NASA’s budget be steadily grown to restore NASA’s purchasing power and enable it to do more great things for our nation.

AIA is concerned about the President’s FY 2018 NASA budget proposal of $19.1 billion, which is $553 million less than last years’ enacted level. Of even greater concern, the Administration projected funding for NASA over the next five years is at a flat level of $19.062 billion with no adjustment for inflation. NASA’s budget, adjusted for inflation, is already below where it was in the mid-1990’s. If we are ever going to send humans to Mars, accomplish bold new science missions or assure continued U.S. leadership in aeronautics, NASA cannot continually fall behind as inflation eats away at its ability to be an engine of U.S. ingenuity, economic activity and jobs.

Whichever NASA top line one assumes, substantial cuts are being proposed to the Human Exploration and Operations Directorate. Such cuts would be detrimental to the US goal of human exploration beyond Earth orbit and to continue scientific study of our solar system and universe. If the U.S. is ever to see the next elements of the exploration enterprise developed, the Space Launch System (SLS), Orion crew capsule, commercial cargo and cargo must see program
budget increases, not decreases. For example, the President’s FY18 budget proposes cuts to space operations by 4.2 percent ($210 million) and exploration systems by nine percent ($390 million). These exploration enterprise systems are the future of space - taking Americans to Mars and maintaining US space leadership.

NASA’s Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate funding is also at risk. In AIA’s view, NASA’s Aeronautics budget has long been underfunded, so we appreciated the FY 2017 action by Congress to appropriate $660 million for aeronautics - a $20 million increase over the FY2016 funding level. The FY 2018 request of $624 million effectively cuts the aeronautics budget below what was enacted in FY 2015 and flatlines it for a total of five years. This comes at a time when NASA has developed a bold, comprehensive plan to rebuild U.S. aeronautics research capability to continue America’s aviation leadership in a very competitive international field.

Lastly, the proposed decrease of over $160 million to Earth Science in NASA’s Science Mission Directorate from the FY2017 enacted level would have substantial adverse impacts to programs critical to understanding our planet, managing resources, and protecting global populations from extreme weather events and wildfires. Investments in Earth Science yield new and advanced capabilities for weather measurements, water resource management, drought forecasting, and food security that are used daily for both civil and national security purposes. The missions form the foundation for collecting environmental intelligence, bringing together disparate sets of data and measurements of our atmosphere, oceans, and land surface.

AIA calls upon the Congress to build on last year's' budget for NASA and reject the reductions contained within the President’s budget request. While NASA’s budget accounts for less than 0.4 percent of federal spending, every dollar NASA spends is a smart investment in our growing economy. It helps assure scientific, technical, and human exploration leadership for our nation and development of innovative new technologies that make our industries more globally competitive. As the U.S. government addresses its fiscal challenges it is more important than ever to recognize that steady funding for NASA’s programs is a small, but irreplaceable investment in our future.

AIA is also concerned about the critical space-based environmental monitoring (SBEM) programs undertaken by NASA on behalf of NOAA NESDIS. NOAA’s polar and geostationary weather satellites, along with ocean and atmospheric scientific systems and supercomputing and ground systems infrastructure, currently enable the most accurate weather forecasts in history. In no small part, this reflects your annual appropriations investments in NOAA’s environmental data collection from space to feed the greatly improved weather forecasting capability. To continue to protect this vital function for the nation, NOAA needs sufficient up front funding to develop the space systems in time to reduce the risk of weather data gaps. Given that, AIA greatly appreciates your efforts to fund the Polar Follow On (PFO) program at the level of $370 million in FY 2016. Surprisingly, upon getting full funding in FY2016, the NOAA FY 2017 omnibus appropriations was $64 million less than requested. Even more startling then is the FY2018 request of $179 million - well over 70 percent less than the projected need of $586 million. This program is designed to capitalize on current investments on the JPSS 1 and 2 satellites, thereby creating economies of scale. Any cuts to the program will essentially jeopardize
this critical flow of safety information that every citizen relies upon. Your continued support for these satellite programs will assure that NOAA can continue to meet its vital responsibility for the nation.

Budget instability drives long term costs higher, delays program execution and creates program uncertainty that makes it more difficult to work with international partner nations in our efforts to explore deep space. NASA and NOAA programs enable a world-class workforce and industrial base that are all too easily lost without sufficient funding. Undertaking these missions helps inspire young people who are considering careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields, and their dramatic demonstration of national leadership should not be underestimated in an increasingly challenging world.

We look forward to working with you as you finalize the FY 2018 budget. Thank you once again for your leadership on NASA and NOAA budget and policy matters.

Sincerely,

David F. Melcher
President and CEO
Aerospace Industries Association