June 10, 2008

The Honorable Bart Gordon
Chairman
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2320 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ralph M. Hall
Ranking Member
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2320 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Udall
Chairman
Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2325 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Feeney
Ranking Member
Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee
Committee on Science and Technology
U.S. House of Representatives
2325 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Gordon, Hall, Udall and Feeney:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU), an association which represents 60 leading public and private research universities in the United States, I would like to take this opportunity to express our support for H.R. 6063, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Act of 2008. The research university community applauds the Committee on Science and Technology’s recent passage of this important authorization bill.

The research university community has a longstanding, collaborative relationship with NASA. In our view, the bill lays an excellent foundation for framing NASA’s priorities and operations in 2009.

NASA has faced significant budgetary challenges over the last several years. Some have said that the agency has simply been tasked with doing too much, without sufficient resources. We agree with this assessment, and are pleased that this authorization bill calls for funding the agency at $19.2 billion in fiscal year 2009. We are also pleased that the bill authorizes an additional $1 billion to accelerate the development of Orion and Ares 1, and that it authorizes NASA’s Science Mission Directorate at $4.9 billion and its Aeronautics Mission Directorate at $853 million. In our view, this level of funding for the agency and its directorates would enable NASA to support a balanced set of scientific, aeronautical, and exploration-related missions in fiscal year 2009.

In addition to the overall funding levels for the agency, we are pleased that the bill contains provisions calling for increased support for technology and development grants, suborbital research activities, and research and analysis grants. All of these programs are instrumental in the education and training of our nation’s next generation of scientists, engineers, and systems managers, and essential to the performance of science, aeronautics, and explorations missions.
This bill does a fine job of addressing both short and long-term priorities for the agency. We appreciate the committee’s reaffirmation of the importance of a balanced science portfolio, as well as its reaffirmation of the Mars Exploration Program. Moreover, we appreciate the committee’s willingness to address the timely and important issue of export controls. Innovation – the development of cutting-edge technology – does not take place in a vacuum. It is a result of collaboration among fellow scientists and engineers, some of whom are our partners throughout the world. By directing the Office of Science and Technology Policy to carry out a study on export controls, this bill takes the important step of beginning to reform current export control regulations in a way that protects our nation’s security while making possible vital research.

Once again, AAU thanks the committee for its passage of the FY09 NASA authorization bill. We look forward to working with you and your staff to ensure passage of the bill by the full House of Representatives.

With warm regards,

Robert M. Berdahl