

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

2321 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6301

(202) 225-6375
www.science.house.gov

February 6, 2019

The Honorable James F. Bridenstine
Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
300 E Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20546

Dear Administrator Bridenstine,

The Committee on Science, Space, & Technology is conducting oversight of the operations of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) during the government shutdown that began on December 22, 2018 and concluded on January 25, 2019. It is clear from multiple media reports that the government shutdown had a significant impact on federal science agencies, their contractors, grant recipients, and others who depend on federal funds to engage in research, development and the exploration of space. Last year the federal budget for these activities was more than \$175 billion.¹

Because of the federal shutdown, PhD students were not able to communicate with their advisers, hampering their education; postdoctoral students on fellowships were not being paid; non-government scientists were unable to obtain federal permits to complete various studies; and access to federal data, scientific collections and other resources has ceased.² Federal scientists were also forced to cancel long-planned research trips and attendance at scientific meetings, academic scientists were not been able to communicate with their federal peers on projects or scientific papers they are collaborating on, and research projects were simply stopped as funding channels for federal grants and other scientific research efforts were halted.³

¹ FY 2018 R&D Appropriations Dashboard, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), accessed here: <https://www.aaas.org/programs/r-d-budget-and-policy/fy-2018-rd-appropriations-dashboard>

² Lauren Morello, "US science agencies hit by government shutdown," *Nature*, December 22, 2018, accessed here: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07836-6>

³ See: Gisele Grayson, Joe Palca and Geoff Brumfiel, "With Key Government Agencies Shut Down, Science Sputters," *National Public Radio (NPR)*, January 10, 2019, accessed here:

<https://www.npr.org/2019/01/10/683716451/with-key-government-agencies-shut-down-science-sputters> and Carolyn Wilke, "Government Shutdown Hits Funding, Resources, and Morale in Science," *The Scientist*, January

The U.S. civil space program is a catalyst of American innovation, inspiration, discovery and technological leadership. The nation has set the goal of advancing human space exploration beyond low Earth orbit. However, key systems to enable deep space exploration, such as the Space Launch System, experienced impacts from the shutdown. According to media reports, some testing on NASA's Space Launch System was suspended and work on an engine test stand was interrupted.⁴ The Government Accountability Office (GAO) has reported on existing cost and schedule challenges for NASA's exploration systems projects.⁵ The duration of the lapse in government funding will likely exacerbate those challenges and have a negative impact on the timing of achieving the nation's goals in human exploration. In addition, the Congressionally-chartered Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP) has reported on concerns regarding uncertainties in funding and the complexities that such uncertainties can add to managing programs. According to the 2016 Annual Report from that panel, "*This complexity and uncertainty can distract teams from maintaining the required focus on safety.*"⁶ I am concerned that the federal shutdown will exacerbate these concerns and uncertainties.

The federal scientific grant process helps to empower American innovation and energize our economy. Since many of these activities were halted during the shutdown, this will undoubtedly delay scientific research, fieldwork, and the discovery of issues critical to the health, safety, and security of all Americans across the nation and our competitive advantage around the world.⁷ I am concerned that the disruptions and delays throughout many science agencies have hindered the federal scientific enterprise as a result of the shutdown and may lead to longer-term damage.

In addition, the shutdown had a negative and consequential impact on the livelihoods, families, and health of federal workers.⁸ It is also unclear how individual agencies determined which staff were deemed "essential" and which staff were not.⁹ Tens of thousands of workers who were not deemed "essential" at the beginning of the shutdown was called back to work without pay.¹⁰

11, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/government-shutdown-hits-funding--resources--and-morale-in-science--65314>

⁴ Jacqueline Klimas, "Shutdown puts crimp in Space Launch Testing," *Politico Space*, January 14, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/politico-space/2019/01/14/shutdown-puts-crimp-in-space-launch-system-testing-375736> and William Harwood, "Unpaid NASA workers protect critical missions during government shutdown," *CBS News*, updated January 18, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/government-shutdown-nasa-protects-assets-missions-affected-by-the-shutdown/>

⁵ "NASA: Assessment of Major Projects," Government Accountability Office (GAO), May 2018, accessed here: <https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/691589.pdf>

⁶ Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel, "Annual Report for 2016," p.2, accessed here: https://oiir.hq.nasa.gov/asap/documents/2016_ASAP_Annual_Report.pdf

⁷ Lauren Morello, "US science agencies hit by government shutdown," *Nature*, December 22, 2018, accessed here: <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-07836-6>

⁸ Michael Burke, "Federal worker with diabetes says she can't afford to pay for insulin during shutdown," *The Hill*, January 13, 2019, accessed here: <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/425113-federal-worker-with-diabetes-says-she-cant-afford-to-pay-for>

⁹ Kimberly Adams, "Definition of an essential worker does a shutdown shift," *Marketplace*, American Public Media, January 17, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.marketplace.org/2019/01/17/economy/definition-essential-worker-does-shutdown-shift>

¹⁰ Erica Werner, "Trump administration calling nearly 50,000 back to work, unpaid, as shutdown drags on," *The Washington Post*, January 15, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/rank-and->

Furthermore, some federal contractors may not receive back pay, and others paid their workers out of their own pockets without any assurance they will be paid back by the federal government.¹¹

In order to assist the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in its oversight, please provide copies of the records requested below and answers to the following questions:

- Please indicate the total number of federal employees in your agency and how many were furloughed as a result of the government shutdown.
 - How many contractors are employed by your agency, and how many were furloughed as a result of the government shutdown?
 - Please provide all Agency records, including memoranda, guidance documents, legal opinions, summaries, or other documents provided to federal contractors about continuing their work for the Agency during the shutdown, including all records provided to federal contractors regarding Agency guidance on using their own funds during the government shutdown.
- How many of your agency's employees were deemed "essential?"
 - Indicate how many of your staff, if any, not deemed "essential" were brought back to work without pay during the government shutdown.
 - Please provide all records, including memoranda, guidance documents, legal opinions, summaries, or other documents that indicate how your Agency has defined an "essential" employee. This should include any specific tasks or functions that your Agency has deemed "essential."
- Please provide copies of all records, including memoranda, summaries, after action reports or other documents that indicate the potential or actual impact, delay or damage to research efforts within your agency that were adversely affected by the government shutdown.
- Government shutdowns incur costs greater than those of an open, fully functioning federal government.¹² Please provide all agency assessments, impact analyses, memoranda, or other records that address both the potential, actual or anticipated cost and consequences from the government shutdown on your agency.

[file-democrats-reject-trumps-invitation-to-shutdown-talks-backing-leaders-in-united-opposition-to-border-wall/2019/01/15/2539482e-18d2-11e9-9ebf-c5fed1b7a081_story.html?utm_term=.59db4d3835ca](https://www.wmur.com/article/federal-contractor-pays-workers-despite-shutdown/26016877)

¹¹ See: Jennifer Crompton, "Federal contractor pays workers despite shutdown," *WMUR/Channel 9*, Manchester, New Hampshire, January 23, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.wmur.com/article/federal-contractor-pays-workers-despite-shutdown/26016877> and Sarah Ruiz-Grossman, "Shutdown Leaves Government Contractors Without Work And Likely No Back Pay," (*updated*) January 2, 2019, accessed here: www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/government-contractors-shutdown-wages-lost_us_5c255621e4b08aaf7a8ed79a

¹² Jim Tankersley, "A Shut Down Government Actually Costs More Than an Open One," *New York Times*, January 9, 2019, accessed here: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/09/us/politics/shutdown-government-costs.html>

- Please provide an itemized list of travel plans by agency employees, contractors, and grantee recipients that were postponed, rescheduled, or cancelled as a result of the government shutdown.

Under the “special oversight” clause of Rule X of the U.S. House of Representatives, the “Committee on Science, Space, and Technology shall review and study on a continuing basis laws, programs, and Government activities relating to nonmilitary research and development.”¹³

Please produce two sets of requested records in a searchable electronic format. One set should be delivered to the Majority Staff of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee in Room 2321 of the Rayburn House Office Building and one set should be delivered to for the Minority Staff in Room 394 of the Ford House Office Building. Please ensure these documents are produced and delivered by Thursday, February 14, 2019.

If you have any questions regarding this request please have your staff contact Pamela Whitney on the Majority Staff of the Science Committee at (202) 225-6375.

Sincerely,



Eddie Bernice Johnson
Chairwoman

Committee on Science, Space & Technology

cc: Rep. Frank Lucas, Ranking Member, Committee on Science, Space & Technology

¹³ Rule X, Organization of Committees, U.S. House of Representatives, accessed here:
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/HMAN-115/xml/HMAN-115-pg441.xml>