

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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November 21, 2025

Mr. Robert H. Steinau
Senior Official
Office of Inspector General
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
300 Hidden Figures Way, SW
Washington, D.C., 20546

Dear Mr. Steinau,

We write to request that your office initiate a formal audit of NASA's management of the Goddard Space Flight Center. Specifically, we request that your office evaluate the agency's recent actions regarding the relocation and closure of buildings, laboratories, facilities, equipment, and personnel at Goddard, including (but not limited to) the main Goddard campus in Greenbelt, Maryland. As Members of the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology ("the Committee"), we are deeply concerned that the agency's actions are degrading Goddard's scientific and technical capabilities, and that they may be inflicting long-term damage on Goddard's ability to carry out its responsibilities and NASA's ability to carry out the responsibilities that have been given to it by Congress. We are also troubled by the lack of transparency that has characterized NASA's implementation of these closures and relocations, both towards Congress and towards affected Goddard employees themselves. We believe an independent audit is necessary to determine the true impact of the recent – and ongoing – disruptions at Goddard. Such an audit would greatly assist the Committee as it considers the steps that will be necessary to ensure Goddard continues to serve as a pillar of NASA science, engineering, and space flight, and a world-class research and development facility.

The United States is the world's preeminent spacefaring nation, and the Goddard Space Flight Center is America's preeminent hub supporting flight activity and research in space. Goddard was established on May 1, 1959, as NASA's very first space flight complex.¹ Goddard's long and storied history encompasses many of NASA's most iconic scientific missions, from the launch of the nation's first weather observation satellite in 1960 through the flagship Hubble Space Telescope and James Webb Space Telescope missions that have transformed our understanding of the universe.² Goddard's ongoing work carries this proud legacy forward, as contemporary

¹ <https://www.nasa.gov/goddard/about/>.

² <https://www.nasa.gov/goddard-missions/>.

flagship missions such as the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope near completion and usher in the next wave of scientific discoveries in space.³ To accomplish its groundbreaking scientific and engineering work, Goddard maintains unique and essential facilities and capabilities alongside one of the most brilliant scientific and engineering workforces assembled anywhere on Earth. Goddard is, in many ways, the heart and soul of NASA science. And NASA, we must not forget, is a multi-mission agency charged since its creation in 1958 with contributing materially to “the expansion of human knowledge of the Earth and of phenomena in the atmosphere and space.” Without Goddard, our understanding of our planet, our solar system, and our universe would be limited to far narrower horizons.

While Goddard has maintained its usual standard of excellence in recent years, it is also confronting undeniable long-term challenges. Many of these challenges exist throughout NASA, and indeed throughout the entire federal scientific enterprise. For many years, Goddard has grappled with tight annual budgets, a senior workforce increasingly eligible for retirement, aging infrastructure, and substantial deferred maintenance costs. These issues pose real questions that NASA and Goddard cannot afford to ignore regardless of the political context. We recognize the need for investment, modernization, and rational planning at Goddard, and we support good faith efforts to enhance its capacity to support NASA’s civil space mission for decades to come.

One such good faith effort was the agency’s Master Plan for Goddard 2017-2037 (“Master Plan”). The Master Plan was a carefully developed “blueprint for Goddard’s future” that was intended to establish a sustainable and coherent vision for the future of the center.⁴ The Master Plan pursued three overarching priorities: maintaining mission capability; envisioning the Goddard campuses of the future; and meeting affordability goals.⁵ It called for an array of interconnected modernization activities to take place over two decades, including the construction of new buildings, the divestiture and demolition of other buildings, the remodeling of some existing facilities, and the eventual reduction of Goddard’s footprint by 25% without compromising the center’s ability to achieve its mission and meet its responsibilities.⁶ We cannot emphasize enough that the Master Plan, which was formally adopted in 2019, was a holistic roadmap, with each component of the plan relying on the others to succeed. The Master Plan’s 20-year time horizon for implementation was a necessary concession to the complexities of the task and the importance of acting in a prudent and thoughtful manner without creating unacceptable risks and costs for Goddard’s scientific and technical capabilities.

What is happening right now at Goddard is not prudent, thoughtful, in good faith, or rational. Goddard’s challenges are real, but we are hard pressed to see any justification suggesting a sudden crisis that requires drastic and chaotic intervention on a timeline of months, weeks, or days. Yet that is what NASA claims in order to justify the actions of recent months, and the actions that apparently will continue for the foreseeable future.

In September 2025 – with no notification, disclosure, or justification to the Committee – NASA began a sudden rush to shutter half of Goddard’s main Greenbelt campus by March 2026. According to an email obtained by Space.com, management at Goddard informed the center’s

³ <https://roman.gsfc.nasa.gov/>.

⁴ https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/gsfcmasterplan_digest_feb2022_lo_res_website.pdf.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.*

employees on September 22nd that the agency planned to “initiate a series of moves... that will reduce our footprint into fewer buildings,” and that “unlike previous large-scale Center reconfigurations, which occurred over a number of years, all planned moves will take place over the next several months and will be completed by March of 2026.”⁷ Subsequent reporting, along with information obtained independently by the Committee Minority, confirms that Goddard did indeed commence with its planned “moves” almost immediately, even while a government shutdown suspended most federal activities in October and early November.⁸ Since the end of September, Goddard has rapidly started to disassemble laboratories, empty out buildings, and mark equipment for excess, disposal, or relocation, in some instances without even identifying a new destination for relocation on campus. One press report characterized the situation as an “attack from within” on Goddard that threatened to end with the “sinking” of the center.⁹ Another press report questioned whether NASA intended to “quietly gut” the Goddard campus during the shutdown.¹⁰ Naturally, there are serious questions from Congress, concerned stakeholders, and Goddard employees themselves about whether such activities violated the Anti-Deficiency Act.

The agency has attempted to justify these moves by invoking the Master Plan, including in a staff-level briefing provided to Democratic Committee staff on November 4th, during which Goddard management claimed that the closures and relocations of recent weeks leveraged the Master Plan. But that assertion contradicts our understanding of Goddard, the information that has been reported from Goddard, and basic common sense. It simply defies belief to argue that the recent activities at Goddard – with their drastically expedited timelines, lack of transparency, and total absence of efforts to mitigate the disruption – represent anything other than an abandonment of the carefully-conceived framework of the Master Plan in favor of a chaotic and irrational leap to reconfigure and downsize as much of Goddard as possible, as quickly as possible. It is wrong, and it risks incalculable damage to NASA’s scientific leadership.

We have observed the events at Goddard with increasing alarm since early October. While it is not necessary in the context of this letter to catalog them in their entirety, the following examples illustrate the nature of our concerns. Based on information obtained by the Committee, we can assert the following:

- Goddard management’s communications to the Goddard workforce regarding closures and relocations during the government shutdown were erratic and highly irregular. The designation of excepted activities appears to have shifted arbitrarily over the course of the shutdown. In some instances, furloughed employees were notified by the agency that they were required to return to duty with 48 hours’ notice to remove equipment or personal belongings before a sudden relocation threatened to put those materials at risk of disposal. In many cases, instructions from supervisors to employees regarding closures or relocations appear to have been delivered orally rather than in written form, eliminating the possibility of an official paper trail for these highly irregular decisions and directives. On a number of occasions, employees were not officially informed about the destination to which critical equipment would be relocated.

⁷ <https://www.space.com/space-exploration/nasa-is-sinking-its-flagship-science-center-during-the-government-shutdown-and-may-be-breaking-the-law-in-the-process>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ <https://www.cnn.com/2025/11/04/science/nasa-goddard-building-closures-government-shutdown>.

- Goddard’s closure and relocation activities around Building 11 on the Greenbelt campus emptied out a propulsion laboratory that was mission-critical for the Roman Space Telescope and Dragonfly missions, as well as a cleanroom that was mission-critical for Roman, threatening cost and schedule setbacks and the success of both missions. Earlier this year, Goddard management had agreed to allow the Roman Space Telescope mission team to utilize the facilities in Building 11 without disruption until Roman was moved to its launch site in July 2026. The new directive from management in late September that all building closures would occur by March 2026 breached that agreement. But the situation deteriorated drastically the week of November 3rd, when Goddard employees were suddenly informed that the Building 11 propulsion laboratory, cleanroom, and flight storage area would be emptied out on the following Wednesday, November 12th. On that day, movers arrived at Building 11 and started to move highly sensitive equipment from the laboratory before personnel from the Office of Safety and Mission Assurance (OSMA) could arrive to supervise the activity and ensure proper safety protocols were maintained; management had previously told employees that movers would not arrive before a designated time, to ensure engineers could advise on the handling of sensitive equipment. A temporary cleanroom had been promised as the relocation site for hardware that had been permanently housed in the cleanroom of Building 11, but it was not ready on the day of the move; as a result, hardware had to be placed in a non-clean area of a heavily trafficked building, where it remains to this day. The mission-critical propulsion laboratory and cleanroom of Building 11 now sit empty without appropriate replacement facilities in place, introducing completely unnecessary cost, schedule, and risk factors for Roman and Dragonfly that could have been avoided or mitigated if the agency had acted with due caution, care, and patience. These actions may well end Goddard’s ability to build propulsion systems for NASA science missions.

These examples are extremely troubling on their face and portend broader questions about the fate of the center at large. If this is how Goddard management chose to communicate with its employees, what other risks may have fallen through the cracks? If this is how Goddard management decided to approach one mission-critical laboratory in one building, how much damage is being done across the entire center? If this is how the agency handles one of its most high-profile flagship missions, how many other missions are in imminent danger of being irrevocably lost? How does the loss of Goddard capabilities affect NASA’s ability to enable future missions? Is NASA speeding to implement its interpretation of this administration’s priorities, regardless of congressional direction for NASA science?

NASA’s reckless and inexplicable “relocation” activities at Goddard have created real dangers for the center and its workforce. The agency risks permanently degrading Goddard’s scientific and technical capabilities with these moves. The situation demands immediate oversight. We intend to continue the Committee’s oversight of this matter until we can once again trust NASA to be fully transparent with the Committee and to manage Goddard rationally, in a manner that appropriately fulfills the center’s indispensable role in American scientific and engineering leadership in civil space. We also believe the ongoing situation at Goddard demands an independent review by your office. We request that the NASA OIG conducts an independent audit to establish the facts, determine the intent behind the agency’s actions, and assess the

impacts for Goddard that have already occurred and may occur in the future if these actions continue. Specifically, we request that the audit evaluate the following matters:

1. Please assess the decision-making process that resulted in the agency's decision to initiate widespread relocations and closures of buildings, facilities, laboratories, equipment, and personnel at the Goddard Space Flight Center in the fall of 2025, as well as the decisions and actions leading up to such relocations and closures. As a part of that assessment, please scrutinize the motivations and intentions behind the agency's decision.
2. Please determine the extent to which the widespread closures and relocations occurring at Goddard are consistent with the Master Plan for Goddard 2017-2037, and the extent to which they deviate from the Master Plan. As a part of that determination, please consider:
 - a. The accelerated timeline of the closures and relocations;
 - b. The specific buildings, facilities, laboratories, and equipment subject to closures and relocations; and
 - c. The efforts undertaken (or not undertaken) by the agency to mitigate capability and mission disruptions caused by closures and relocations, and the extent to which those mitigation efforts are consistent with the mitigation called for in the Master Plan or deviate from the Master Plan.
3. Please evaluate whether the agency's actions regarding closures and relocations at Goddard comply with all applicable laws, regulations, and agency rules. As a part of that evaluation, please review:
 - a. How and why Goddard leadership determined that relocation activities must occur during the government shutdown, particularly those which affected or required the participation of furloughed employees;
 - b. Whether the agency's actions at Goddard regarding closures and relocations have complied with agency rules and regulations pertaining to the tracking, storage, and disposal of government property and equipment; and
 - c. Whether the agency's communications with the Goddard workforce regarding closures and relocations have complied with agency requirements for the written documentation of policies and directives to agency employees.
4. Please assess the cost impacts of the recent relocations and closures at Goddard; whether the actions have produced savings or losses for the agency's budget; and to which budget accounts those savings or losses apply. In addition, please identify how the moves were funded and any associated cost and schedule impacts to ongoing projects.
5. Please evaluate the impacts of the widespread closures and relocations in terms of Goddard's capacity to execute its responsibilities and support NASA's mission. As a part of that evaluation, please consider impacts in the following areas:
 - a. Goddard's scientific, engineering, and technical capabilities;
 - b. Goddard's scientific, engineering, and logistical infrastructure;

- c. Goddard's workforce; and
- d. Missions being overseen by Goddard, including but not limited to the completion of the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope and the Dragonfly mission.

Goddard is critical to America's continuing leadership in space. But it is no secret that Goddard has been targeted by the White House since day one of the Trump Administration. The administration's proposed draconian cuts to NASA science would strike at the heart of Goddard, and by extension, the heart of our nation's civil space program. It is crucial for us to understand whether the closure and relocation activities at Goddard seek to further the administration's broader goal of diminishing NASA science by directly attacking Goddard itself. We appreciate the NASA OIG's assistance in these efforts.

Pursuant to Rule X of the 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."¹¹ The Committee possesses jurisdiction over the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, as well as "astronautical research and development, including resources, personnel, equipment, and facilities" and "outer space, including exploration and control thereof."¹²

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Pamela Whitney or Josh Schneider with the Committee's Minority staff at (202) 225-6375. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

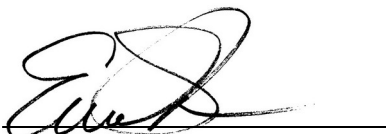
Sincerely,



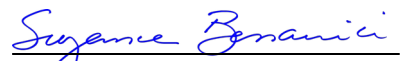
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Ranking Member
Committee on Science,
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Valerie P. Foushee
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Emilia Strong Sykes
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on
Investigations and Oversight



Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

¹¹ [119 First Session House Rules](#).

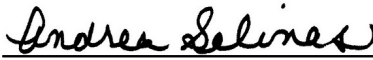
¹² *Id.*



Haley M. Stevens
Member of Congress



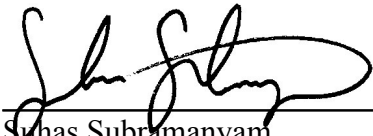
Deborah K. Ross
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Andrea Salinas
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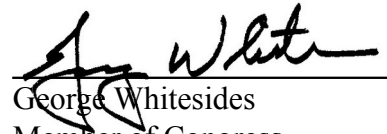
Suhas Subramanyam
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Luz M. Rivas
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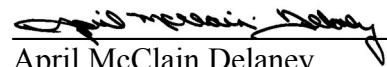
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April McClain Delaney
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CC: Chairman Brian Babin
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology