

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 28, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
The Capitol, Room S-128  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Vice Chair  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
The Capitol, Room S-146A  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and  
Science  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 133  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Vice Chair  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and  
Science  
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations  
Hart Senate Office Building, Room 125  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Vice Chair Collins, Chair Shaheen and Vice Chair Moran,

We write in strong support of robust funding for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Johnson Space Center (JSC), to tackle the strategic threats and opportunities facing our nation. As you develop the final FY24 Commerce, Justice Science (CJS) appropriations bill, we urge you to, at a minimum, provide stable funding for science and space programs implemented by NASA, especially those programs involving human space exploration. Given that space technological innovation is a critical aspect of our ongoing strategic competition with China and Russia, we would also encourage you to consider possible funding increases in strategic areas of national importance such as human exploration and space operations.

Situated in Houston, Texas, JSC stands as NASA's primary center for human spaceflight operations and research. Its pivotal role encompasses a broad range of capabilities and activities dedicated to advancing space exploration. At the heart of JSC's mission lies the preparation and training of astronauts for their ventures aboard the International Space Station (ISS), and soon the Gateway and lunar surface. Through rigorous simulations, extravehicular activity rehearsals, and specialized task training, astronauts are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of their missions. Moreover, JSC's Mission Control Center plays a central role in the integration and management of all NASA missions, providing crucial communication between astronauts and ground control during spacewalks, scientific experiments, and unforeseen contingencies.

One of JSC's primary responsibilities is spacecraft development and testing for human spaceflight. Notably, it plays a crucial role in the development of Orion, a spacecraft designed for future missions beyond Earth's orbit, including crewed missions to the Moon and Mars. Additionally, as a major contributor to NASA's Artemis program, JSC is instrumental in planning lunar missions, designing lunar landers and spacesuits, and conducting lunar science

research. Furthermore, the center serves as a hub for cutting-edge research in microgravity, enabling scientists from around the world to conduct experiments aboard the ISS, exploring fundamental scientific questions, technology advancements, and biomedical research. JSC's contributions also extend to pioneering advancements in robotics and artificial intelligence for use in spacecraft assembly, maintenance, and planetary exploration.

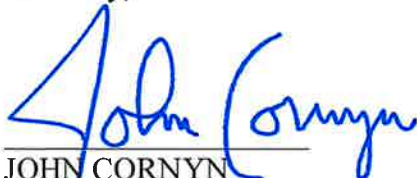
Of particular concern is the proposed extraterrestrial sampling facility language in the Senate FY 2024 CJS bill that could potentially undermine JSC's role in astromaterials. Specifically, dedicating a new facility for sampling could disrupt the streamlined coordination and expertise that currently exists within the Astromaterials Research and Exploration Science (ARES) Division at JSC. The handling and analysis of extraterrestrial samples demand precision and collaboration, which have been meticulously honed within the existing setup at JSC. Moving these operations elsewhere risks compromising this efficient synergy, leading to costly delays and redundancies in our scientific pursuits.

Moreover, we firmly believe that centralizing these activities at JSC promotes the optimal use of resources. The infrastructure and personnel available at JSC have been carefully developed and refined over the years to meet the unique challenges of handling extraterrestrial samples securely and efficiently. Setting up an additional facility outside of this established environment would undoubtedly incur substantial financial burdens without offering any meaningful advantages in return.

Additionally, the success of the Mars Sample Return mission relies heavily on seamless coordination, stringent protocols, and expertise in handling extraterrestrial samples. The ARES Division has been at the forefront of developing and refining the necessary capabilities for this mission. Any diversion of resources, personnel, or infrastructure to a separate sample-receiving facility would inevitably introduce new challenges and could disrupt the intricate preparations for the Mars Sample Return mission. To safeguard the significance and potential success of this mission, we urge you to maintain funding and infrastructure at JSC.

We believe that the final FY24 CJS bill should address all national security requirements, including growing multi-domain threats posed by strategic competitors, such as China and Russia, and must include robust funding for NASA and the key science and space exploration missions that it oversees. Thank you for your attention to this matter. We are hopeful that you will take our concerns into account during the conference of House and Senate bills.

Sincerely,



JOHN CORNYN  
United States Senator



TED CRUZ  
United States Senator