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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6025
www.senate.gov/~appropriations

March 11, 2004

Hon. Sean O'Keefe
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
300 C St., SW
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Administrator O'Keefe:

As the Chairman and Ranking Member of the VA/HUD Subcommittee, we believe that further study and analysis by independent experts is required before a final decision is made to cancel the next servicing mission to the Hubble Space Telescope. We request that NASA contract with the National Academy of Sciences to conduct an independent review of the Hubble servicing mission.

An inquiry of this kind is supported by the initial review conducted by Admiral Harold Gehman, who states "only a deep and rich study of the entire gain/risk equation can answer the question of whether an extension of the life of the wonderful Hubble telescope is worth the risks involved." We agree. Hubble's contributions to space science are truly extraordinary and should not be terminated prematurely without a thorough and rigorous look at all relevant safety and resource issues.

As you know, astronaut safety is our number one priority. We fully support the findings of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board and NASA's efforts to implement all of the Board's recommendations prior to return to flight. We believe a study by the National Academy of Sciences will only enhance understanding of the risks involved in a servicing mission and what steps can be taken to make it as safe as possible.

The National Academy of Sciences is the most highly respected organization of its kind in the world. Its world class membership of scientists and engineers are uniquely capable of conducting this study and providing Congress with the answers needed to make prudent decisions about Hubble's future.

In addition, we request that you take no action to stop, suspend or terminate any contracts or employment in connection with the final servicing mission until this study is completed, and Congress has taken action on NASA's fiscal year 2005 budget. Should it be determined that a servicing mission should move forward, it is critical that time not be lost.

As this Subcommittee conducts its oversight role, it is essential that we have the best advice from a broad range of experts on this issue.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Bond
Chairman
Subcommittee on VA/HUD
Independent Agencies

Barbara A. Mikulski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on VA/HUD and
and Independent Agencies

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WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6025
www.senate.gov/~appropriations

March 11, 2004

Hon. Robert Walker
Comptroller General of the United States
General Accounting Office
441 G St., NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

Please conduct a study of NASA's recent decision to terminate the next servicing mission of the Hubble Space Telescope.

An initial review of NASA's decision by Admiral Harold Gehman raised significant issues that warrant further examination. He recommended an in-depth study of the mission to examine the risks, costs and benefits of a mission to Hubble. We agree with the Admiral's recommendation. Specifically, we request the GAO use its unique auditing, financial and managerial expertise to examine the potential costs of a servicing mission and the costs of fully implementing all of the recommendations of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board.

We hope this request provides sufficient initial guidance to start this study for the Subcommittee. Given the importance and timeliness of the issue, we hope that you would be able to complete this study by July 1st.

Sincerely,

Christopher S. Bond
Chairman
Subcommittee on VA/HUD
and Independent Agencies

Barbara A. Mikulski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on VA/HUD
and Independent Agencies