

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 31, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Vice Chair  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Vice Chair Collins,

We write to urge strong funding for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in particular to include at least \$822 million to keep the Mars Sample Return (MSR) mission on schedule to launch by 2030. The mission is not only the top priority of the planetary science community, but the technological innovations it would spur are also critical to our ongoing strategic competition with China and Russia.

The latest Planetary Sciences Decadal Survey identified the MSR mission as the highest scientific priority. For the first time in human history, we would launch a rocket from the surface of another planet and give our scientists the opportunity to directly analyze samples from Mars. The science enabled by the mission and the technological capabilities developed for it would fundamentally change space exploration and shine a light on the power of American ingenuity.

The Independent Review Board (IRB) convened by NASA, in its assessment of the MSR program's implementation plan and management approach, reiterated that MSR should be a national priority because of its scientific and strategic importance. At the same time, the IRB identified specific ways that the mission could be restructured in response to better fit within annual funding constraints. JPL and NASA are already working to implement those suggestions, from shifting the program management structure to eliminating some elements of the mission.

The changes being made to cut MSR costs, however, will require NASA to leverage the current, but aging, Mars infrastructure and rendezvous with the Perseverance rover. To enable a launch by 2030, we urge the inclusion of at least \$822 million for MSR in Fiscal Year 2024, consistent with FY 2023 funding. Flat funding would respond to the concerns raised in the Senate Appropriations Committee report and current fiscal constraints, while meeting the goals of the Decadal Survey and keeping this critical mission on track for launch. Without sufficient funding next year, the 2028-2030 launch window cannot be met, putting the mission in doubt and likely eliminating nearly 1300 highly-skilled jobs across the nation.

Thank you for considering our request, and we look forward to working with you to complete Fiscal Year 2024 appropriations legislation that fully funds our national priorities within a balanced overall scientific program and keeps the United States at the forefront of scientific and technical achievement in space.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



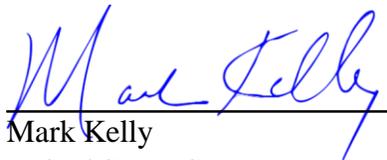
Kyrsten Sinema  
United States Senator



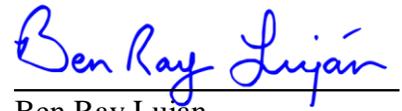
Sherrod Brown  
United States Senator



Laphonza Butler  
United States Senator



Mark Kelly  
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



Mark R. Warner  
United States Senator



Tim Kaine  
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Martin Heinrich  
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