

**TAXPAYERS
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July 18, 2019

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

Administrator Bridenstine:

On behalf of millions of taxpayers across the country, the Taxpayers Protection Alliance (TPA) urges you to keep spending under control at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and prioritize low-cost missions that advance and enhance our understanding of the universe.

As the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing approaches, America has many accomplishments to be proud of in space. America (and taxpayers), however, would only stand to lose from the Trump administration's proposed 2024 return to the lunar surface. Instead of squandering decade-high NASA budgets on retracing the footsteps of astronauts such as Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, the agency should devote its resources toward robotic exploration that could be done at a fraction of the cost and without the health risks that accompany human missions. Taxpayers deserve an agency that champions science while acknowledging the real costs and tradeoffs that come with space exploration.

As NASA prepares to launch a lunar mission, the agency continues to ignore its problem of reckless spending and rampant cost overruns. A May report from the Government Accountability office found that major NASA projects have experienced 30 percent overruns, due to poor planning and seriously flawed initial estimates. The lowball cost estimates are designed to get Congress's approval rather than deliver a realistic cost estimate to taxpayers. Former NASA science chief Alan Stern correctly warned in a 2008 New York Times op-ed that this tendency is, "A CANCER is overtaking our space agency: the routine acquiescence to immense cost increases in projects."

This woeful track record will almost certainly continue with the proposed Moon mission. Already, NASA has spent more than \$17 billion developing the Space Launch System (SLS), slated to carry humans to the lunar surface in 2024. The rocket is running three years behind schedule and will cost double the originally-projected amount. Despite this abysmal contract performance, SLS manufacturer Boeing received more than \$200 million in "award fees" over the life of the contract. But even these astronomical expenses are just a drop in the bucket compared to likely total mission costs. Total mission costs could be anywhere from \$50 billion to \$90 billion, depending on the assumptions used.

Even these estimates, produced by various government bodies over time, fail to consider cost overruns that will inevitably grip this mission and future phases of operation. Instead of locking taxpayers into high costs and mission redundancy, NASA should commit to robot-centric space exploration. The agency

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could save up to 90 percent on the cost of its missions, while making ground-breaking discoveries without exposing humans to the dangerous radiation of outer space. Robotic missions have led to important insights about the Moon and other planetary bodies in the past and will prove crucial to the effort to find extraterrestrial life.

Once again, TPA congratulates NASA on the anniversary of the Apollo 11 Moon landing. But, as NASA administrator, it is your duty and prerogative to change course and keep costs low for taxpayers. America's space program is simply too important to be derailed by over-budget human missions that fail to advance our understanding of the cosmos.

On September 12, 1962, President John F. Kennedy stated that, "We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too." TPA hopes you remember those words when cutting bloat and making decisions that are in the best interest of taxpayers.

Regards,



David Williams
President