PATRICK LEAHY
VERMONT

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
APPROPRIATIONS
JUDICIARY

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–4502

May 15, 2007

The Honorable Robert J. Portman
Director
Office of Management and Budget
Executive Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20503

Dear Director Portman:

In the Senate's oversight capacity on the Appropriations Committee's panel that handles the Senate's work in writing the annual appropriations bills for NASA, I write to ask about the Administration's unilateral deletion from NASA's mission statement of this phrase:

> "To understand and protect our home planet."

Though this action came to light last year, it still has not been adequately explained by the Administration.

My understanding is that NASA's mission statement had been forged in 2001 and 2002 through an inclusive process that involved the work of representatives from the NASA centers, with further input from the general NASA workforce. Elimination of the "home planet" phrase apparently first occurred in an Administration spending report delivered to Congress in February 2006 – the same report that retroactively slashed the Earth Science research budget -- and in the wake of the controversy surrounding the muzzling of NASA scientists like Dr. James Hansen, Director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. This unfortunate action came amid rising concern about the effects of the Administration's intended reductions for NASA's earth sciences budget.

I have seen Administrator Griffin's letter to *The New York Times* (7/25/06) on this topic, which does not satisfactorily answer several questions that I have about this change.

I ask that you supply answers to these questions:

> What process was followed in making this change? Who first suggested this change, and when? What reasons were first used, internally, in attempting to justify this change? Was this decision adequately communicated and explained to the NASA workforce, and if so, how was this done?

VERMONT OFFICES: COURT HOUSE PLAZA, 199 MAIN STREET, BURLINGTON 802 863 2525
FEDERAL BUILDING, ROOM 338, MONTPELIER 802 229 0569
OR DIAL TOLL FREE 1 800 642 3193
SENATOR_LEAHY@LEAHY.SENATE.GOV
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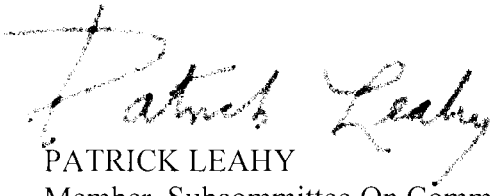
In its substance and in its timing, this change gave every appearance of being another unilateral and politically motivated tangent of what has sometimes been called the Administration's "war on science." This abrupt change was also an affront to NASA's employees, who in good faith participated in the process of constructing NASA's Mission Statement. They, and the American people, deserve to know how this happened, who initiated it, and why.

I make these requests without the knowledge of Dr. Hansen or any other employee of NASA, and I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY
Member, Subcommittee On Commerce, Justice, Science, And Related Agencies
Committee On Appropriations

cc: The Hon. Barbara Mikulski
Chair
Subcommittee On Commerce, Justice, Science, And Related Agencies
Committee On Appropriations

The Hon. Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
Subcommittee On Commerce, Justice, Science, And Related Agencies
Committee On Appropriations

The Hon. Michael Griffin, Administrator, NASA