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April 8, 2025

Ms. Janet Petro  
Acting Administrator  
NASA  
300 E Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Acting Administrator Petro:

I understand you recently [invited](#) NASA's employees to share ideas to improve the agency's efficiency. I applaud this invitation, and I hope you will pay close attention to these ideas. As you know, however, many of these employees find themselves in fear of losing their jobs and of adverse changes to the mission and capabilities of NASA. In acknowledgment of our shared support for NASA and its outstanding employees, and in support of a strong NASA that leads the world in science and human space exploration, I offer to you several ideas of my own that can improve NASA and America's space industry and the [373,000](#) jobs it provides:

1. Work with the White House and others in this Administration to end the self-destructive Trump tariff tax before it damages the commercial space industry and the Artemis program. In addition to the enormous negative impact of the Trump tariff tax on working Americans' 401(k)s, pension plans and life savings, this irresponsible effort will have a detrimental impact on the commercial space industry. In addition to sharply reduced market capitalization, the commercial space industry relies on products such as fuel, rare earth minerals, steel, aluminum, and electronics that will now be subject to higher costs.

Crucially, these higher costs would almost certainly impact NASA's Artemis program. Artemis's architecture – including its launch vehicle, crew capsule and ground systems – all depend on a global supply chain. I urge you and the Administration to be straightforward with the Subcommittee and the American people about the expected increase in Artemis's costs should this trade war continue.

2. Do not cut scientific research in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget request. At a time when economic tensions are rising, NASA and the United States must not foolishly cede America's leadership in space and science. However, recent reporting suggests that the Administration is considering cuts of up to 50 percent to the Science Mission Directorate, and particularly the Earth Science Division, jeopardizing such missions as Landsat Next and other Earth-observing missions.

Appropriations Committee Democrats will fight to prevent such cuts from being enacted because such cuts will hurt Americans and our economy. Cutting NASA's science work would lead to less accurate weather forecasting, less accurate data about climate change and how communities can adapt, and a less accurate understanding of wildfire behavior. Losing this knowledge will damage agricultural interests and threaten American lives and property. I urge NASA not to be complicit in a budget that proposes such harm to the American people and our economy.

3. Do not abandon NASA's commitment to STEM education. As you know, the Trump Administration proposed zeroing-out NASA's STEM education work in its Fiscal Years 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021 budget requests. While this plan was rejected each year it was proposed, it is nonetheless concerning that this Administration may try and repeat its past mistakes. Doing so would eliminate the successful Space Grant Consortium grant, which provides \$850,000 to each state to support STEM education initiatives in classrooms nationwide. It would also eliminate the highly competitive Minority University Research and Education Project, whose grant opportunities drive innovation and scientific breakthroughs nationwide, including more than two dozen in New York. If the Administration does put forward this bad idea, Committee Democrats will fight to reject it yet again.
4. Make public NASA's ethics arrangements with Elon Musk and his staff. I appreciate your previous commitment to me that "employees supporting Department of Government Efficiency [DOGE] activities, must comply with OGE's requirements." However, with at least three DOGE staffers deployed to NASA, the agency must reassure the public that neither Mr. Musk nor SpaceX are gaining from Mr. Musk's staff being stationed at NASA. This can be done by making public the recusals, financial disclosures and other safeguards NASA is using to avoid such potential conflicts of interest. It is vital to NASA's future that the American public maintain confidence in NASA, but the close ties between Mr. Musk and this Administration threaten that confidence. Additionally, NASA should make publicly available all recusals, financial disclosures and other ethics arrangements made by the new Administrator, should he be confirmed by the Senate.

Acting Administrator Petro  
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Please do not hesitate to contact me about any of these recommendations, and I look forward to discussing them with you or with the new Administrator, should he be confirmed by the Senate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Grace Meng", with a stylized, flowing script.

Grace Meng  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on  
Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies