

The NASA Authorization Act of 2005: A Guide for Conferees



For the first time in years, it seems likely that Congress will soon pass a NASA Authorization Act. HR 3070, the House version of the NASA Authorization Act of 2005, passed by an overwhelming 383-15 margin; the Senate version of the bill, S128, is due on the main Senate floor shortly after the end of the August recess. The Space Exploration Alliance, along with the 1.5 million members represented by our various constituent societies and associations, has prepared this Guide for Conferees to express to the Members of Congress our preferred language in those cases where HR 3070 and S1281 have substantive differences.

The report will address the most critical differences between the House and Senate bills, demarcated with an ‘H’ and an ‘S’ respectively; the report will address those sections found only in one of the two versions, as well as those sections where the two bills have substantively different language.

Sections that should be added to the final bill:

Topic	Section	Reason
NASA should replace shuttle capacity for crew and heavy cargo while using current program resources to ease transition.	(S136a, S301a2, S204)	As Administrator Griffin has repeatedly stated, NASA already has a great deal of the elements needed for the next generation of launch vehicles—and it should be sure that these components get used wherever appropriate.
Develop in-situ resource use capability to sustain exploration beyond LEO.	(S134b4)	NASA will be forever limited to short-term and near-Earth missions so long as missions must bring all of their equipment and supplies from Earth; developing the ability to produce some of those supplies on other planets will be key to the Vision.
Requires NASA to work with private sector by allowing contracts with commercial entities for crew and cargo launch services	(H108)	One of NASA’s prime goals is supporting private industry. This language will free NASA’s attentions for things that only NASA can do, while allowing private industry to complete those functions that it can.

Sections that should be added to the final bill (Continued):

Prioritize elements of plan in case of funding shortfalls.	(H502a2)	The Vision for Space Exploration will require a good deal of financial support over a long time period; NASA should be prepared for an unfortunate event that decreases funding for the Vision.
By the beginning of February 2006, NASA shall deliver to Congress a report detailing the plan for the transition of employees trained to operate the Space Shuttle	(H102c)	NASA needs to make certain that it does not suffer a 'brain drain' as talented personnel leave the industry in the light of a lack of appropriate jobs after the retirement of the shuttle fleet.
Sets a Timetable for the Vision for Space Exploration: CEV by ~2010, RTM before 2020	(H101b1, b2)	New Administrator Griffin has pledged NASA's intent to fulfill the Vision for Space Exploration by the earlier end of the given time windows; Congress should support him in this goal.
Requires NASA to create a ground analog capacity to support lunar operations, life support and ISRU	(S135)	NASA should not rush headlong into long and difficult space missions without first investigating the possibility to improving their methods through ground-based analog experiments

Sections that should be left out of the final bill:

Topic	Section	Reason
Do not retire shuttle until replacement has been demonstrated	(S302a)	Although it is important to minimize the time that NASA is without manned access to space, this is the wrong way to do it—it will serve as a loophole to postpone the Vision to continue working on the problems of an aging Shuttle fleet.
Gives specific science recommendations for ISS	(S202)	The Space Station can and should be an important research facility; however, the directions of science should be left up to the professional scientist and engineers.

Preferred Language:

House Language	Senate Language	Reason
Previous legislation capping total expenditures for the ISS at \$25 billion are repealed. (H211)	Allows the Administrator to make recommendations to Congress regarding the necessity of repealing previous legislation capping ISS costs at \$25b. (S201d)	Although the Space Station may require excess funding to reach a point where it can be a valuable resource, that decision should be placed in the hands of the new NASA Administrator