United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 27, 2011

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

As you finalize your budget request to Congress for Fiscal Year 2012 (FY12), we write to ask that you include funding for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) so that NASA can successfully implement the NASA Authorization Act of 2010 (P.L.111-267). The Act codifies a plan for the agency that will help keep America at the forefront of space exploration. Closer to home, it also impacts thousands of Colorado jobs.

Specifically, the NASA Authorization Act instructs NASA to continue work on and leverage past investments in Orion – the multipurpose crew vehicle that will allow for bold exploration beyond low Earth orbit. The Orion spacecraft has already successfully demonstrated a launch abort system and is scheduled for an uncrewed test flight in 2013, proving that the spacecraft is well on its way to meeting the challenges of future space exploration. The further development of Orion is an important and wise part of this latest authorization.

In addition, the NASA Authorization Act expands upon NASA's important work developing commercial crew and cargo capabilities. The commercial space industry is poised to provide access to low Earth orbit. By handing over access to low Earth orbit to the private sector, NASA can focus on the truly groundbreaking and inspiring exploration that has become its hallmark. This represents a mutually beneficial partnership between NASA and industry that will help retain United States capability and leadership in human spaceflight.

As mentioned in your State of the Union Address, we are in austere budgetary times and there is an imperative to address our growing debt. However, in keeping with your 'Sputnik moment' metaphor, we ask that you keep NASA a priority so we do not cede our leadership position in space.

We appreciate your attention to this matter, and we look forward to working with you and our colleagues in Congress to follow up the NASA Authorization Act with funding necessary to carry out this ambitious plan.

Sincerely,

Mark Udall
U.S. Senator

Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator