Astronomy 2202  
Fall 2020  
Long Paper #4

Due: Monday, December 21st  
Length: 1500 – 2000 words  
(length can be relaxed if your letter is strong and concise, but TALK TO PROF. HAYES OR CARLY BEFORE handing in a short letter)

Write a Letter to your Congressional Representative

Now that you have completed a draft of your letter and received comments from both Professor Hayes and Carly, please address those comments and rewrite your letter for this assignment. As you have learned in class, individual citizens can impact policy and make a difference. While we can not require it, we strongly encourage you to mail the revised version of your letter!

An often-misunderstood fact is that, as a constituent, you can affect how your Congressional representative views space science policy. As was described by Casey Drier, our guest lecturer from the beginning of the semester, Planetary Science is a sub-field where letters, phone calls, and in-person visits are an especially effective means of communication with your Congressman (they read and are interested in letters on this topic). Congressional staffers will read your letters (or take your phone calls) and then forward them to your Congressman as appropriate.

Your assignment is to write a letter to your Congressional Representative reflecting your opinion on a topic that we have covered in class. Your topic could be broad, such
as the overall budget of the planetary exploration program, or focused, such as the issue of sample return efforts curtailing a compelling Mars science program or whether Europa Lander is consistent with the goals of the current decadal survey. The objective of this exercise is to help you craft a focused correspondence that explains a complex issue in a clear and concise manner. As was described in the syllabus, your initial draft will be graded and returned to you with comments from both Avani and myself. You will then have the chance to submit revised version of the letter as your fourth long paper assignment. While it is not required, you are encouraged to mail the final draft to your Congressman.

When writing your letter, please remember to:

- Be concise (high signal-to-noise, no chatter)
- Be exceptionally clear
- Effectively use shortcuts to focus their attention (bullet points, bold text, short paragraphs, no run-on sentences, etc.)
- Use formal English syntax (see Strunk and White)

If you don’t already know, the first part of your assignment should be to determine who your representative is (i.e., where you vote). This includes researching which committees he sites on. For international students, email Jose Serrano. Representative Serrano is a Democrat from the 15th District in NY. He is the chair of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations. This is the House subcommittee responsible for NASA's budget. Representative Serrano is a fan of NASA and space exploration, having spoken on its behalf on numerous occasions.

Example topics include, but are certainly not restricted to:

- NASA's declining budget for spacecraft exploration
- Extending missions that are currently in operation
  - MSL
  - New Horizons
  - Dawn
- Your opinion on the optimal split between NASA's human (e.g., Artemis) and robotic (e.g., Discovery / New Frontiers / Flagships) exploration program.
- Why NASA should target a particular body for exploration (Europa, Titan, ...)
- Whether NASA is or is not following the Decadal Survey (e.g., Europa Lander)
- Your opinions regarding the priorities to be assessed in the upcoming Decadal Survey
  - Your feelings regarding Mars Sample Return and the other missions on the flagship priority list.
  - Your feeling on the New Frontiers target list.
  - Your feelings regarding NASA budget allocation (e.g., declining Research and Analysis funds)
  - Your feelings regarding an Ocean World Exploration Program
For the purposes of this assignment, a collection of handouts and background material (including a sample letter) has been posted on the website.

Good luck!

As always, please feel free to come to either Abhinav or myself with questions.