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Griffin also recently promised senators a

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of the next decade, an effort sure to cost

upward of $1 billion even with help from the

European Space Agency. Congress likes the

2006 B UDGET

Can Congress Save NASA Science?

In a remarkable show of bipartisan concern, U.S. lawmakers have ordered NASA not to

sacrifice research programs to pay for President George W. Bush’s vision of humans on

the moon and eventually Mars. But at the same
time, they may have compounded NASA’s problems by giving a tentative green light to

Bush’s plans while providing little relief for an impending budget crunch in science.

Last week, a Senate funding panel told NASA to spend an additional $400 million in its

2006 budget to fix the Hubble Space Telescope and bolster the

flagging earth sciences effort. But the panel added only $134 million to NASA’s $4 billion science

budget to do so. Likewise, the

House version of the spending bill, passed 2 weeks ago, is sympathetic to science but provides a relatively paltry $40 million increase over the president’s request, most of which would go to saving the Glory earth science project. Rec-

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tion, one NASA manager says, “is

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Compounding the problem are a

spate of cost overruns in research projects and growing pressure to
divot money to efforts like a new human

space launcher to replace the space shuttle, which is due to return to flight later this month.

NASA’s new boss Michael Griffin has added another wrinkle: He’s likely to rescue several science projects that the agency

planned to cancel to save money. He recently

ordered continued operation of the Tropical Rainfall Measurement Mission, which NASA sought to turn off last year in a decision

that triggered a congressional outcry (Science, 13 August 2004, p. 927). NASA’s efforts to win funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration failed, so the space agency must shoulder the entire $16 million needed to keep it function-

Shuttle diplomacy. NASA must balance competing needs, such as returning the shuttle to flight, while planning a

new mission to Jupiter’s moon Europa.

The fate of space station science also hangs in the balance. A sweeping internal NASA study laying out a revamped construction schedule for the international space station is due in July. NASA officials say that they must decrease the 28 flights now planned to meet the president’s 2010 deadline for halting shuttle flights. That change, they add, is certain to reduce the number of missions devoted to orbiting research equipment and experiments.

One likely victim, Griffin told Congress, is

the centrifuge, once the central facility for station research. Life scientists will need to “go elsewhere,” he says. “I cannot put microbiology and fundamental life sciences higher than” the need for a new launch vehicle for astronauts.

In contrast, preserving science aboard the station is one of the goals of a bill introduced last week to reauthorize NASA programs. “Such a restriction on the range of research disciplines aboard the [space station] is not in the best interest of the nation or of our partners,” says its sponsor, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison (R–TX). The bill calls for NASA to spend an additional $100 million on station research in the next 5 years and come up with a revamped research plan.

–RICHARD STONE

–ANDREW LAWLER