

NEO News (06/04/08) NASA Authorization language

U.S. House of Representatives Science and Technology Committee Approves NASA Authorization Act (H.R. 6063), with Specific Comments on NEOs

H.R. 6063, introduced by Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Chairman Mark Udall (D-CO), authorizes appropriations for NASA's activities - science, aeronautics, exploration, education, space operations, inspector general, cross-agency support programs - for Fiscal Year 2009. FY 2009 funding for NASA is \$20.21 billion. This bipartisan legislation was originally cosponsored by the Science and Technology Committee's Chairman Bart Gordon (D-TN), Ranking Member Ralph Hall (R-TX), and Subcommittee Ranking Member Tom Feeney (R-FL). "H.R. 6063 will help point NASA towards a more productive and sustainable future," stated Udall. This is proposed language; the NASA Authorization Bill has not been voted into law.

The following draft language in the bill relates to NEOs: (<http://www.spaceref.com/news/viewsr.html?pid=27997>)

TITLE VIII--NEAR-EARTH OBJECTS

SEC. 801. IN GENERAL.

The Congress reaffirms the policy direction established in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration Authorization Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-155) for NASA to detect, track, catalogue, and characterize the physical characteristics of near-Earth objects equal to or greater than 140 meters in diameter. NASA's Near-Earth Object program activities will also provide benefits to NASA's scientific and exploration activities.

SEC. 802. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

- (1) Near-Earth objects pose a serious and credible threat to humankind, as many scientists believe that a major asteroid or comet was responsible for the mass extinction of the majority of the Earth's species, including the dinosaurs, nearly 65,000,000 years ago.
- (2) Several such near-Earth objects have only been discovered within days of the objects' closest approach to Earth and recent discoveries of such large objects indicate that many large near-Earth objects remain undiscovered.
- (3) Asteroid and comet collisions rank as one of the most costly natural disasters that can occur.
- (4) The time needed to eliminate or mitigate the threat of a collision of a potentially hazardous near-Earth object with Earth is measured in decades.
- (5) Unlike earthquakes and hurricanes, asteroids and comets can provide adequate collision information, enabling the United States to include both asteroid-collision and comet-collision disaster recovery and disaster avoidance in its public-safety structure.
- (6) Basic information is needed for technical and policy decision making for the United States to create a comprehensive program in order to be ready to eliminate and mitigate

the serious and credible threats to humankind posed by potentially hazardous near-Earth asteroids and comets.

(7) As a first step to eliminate and to mitigate the risk of such collisions, situation and decision analysis processes, as well as procedures and system resources, must be in place well before a collision threat becomes known.

SEC. 803. REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION.

The Administrator shall issue requests for information on-

(1) a low-cost space mission with the purpose of rendezvousing with and characterizing the Apophis asteroid, which scientists estimate will in 2029 pass at a distance from Earth that is closer than geostationary satellites; and

(2) a medium-sized space mission with the purpose of detecting near-Earth objects equal to or greater than 140 meters in diameter.

SEC. 804. ESTABLISHMENT OF POLICY.

The Director of OSTP shall--

(1) develop a policy for notifying Federal agencies and relevant emergency response institutions of an impending near-Earth object threat, if near term public safety is at stake; and

(2) recommend a Federal agency or agencies to be responsible for protecting the Nation from a near-Earth object that is anticipated to collide with Earth and implementing a deflection campaign, in consultation with international bodies, should one be required.

SEC. 805. PLANETARY RADAR CAPABILITY.

The Administrator shall maintain a planetary radar that is, at minimum, comparable to the capability provided through the NASA Deep Space Network Goldstone facility.

SEC. 806. ARECIBO OBSERVATORY.

Congress reiterates its support for the use of the Arecibo Observatory for NASA-funded near-Earth object-related activities. The Administrator shall ensure the availability of the Arecibo Observatory's planetary radar to support these activities until the National Academies' review of NASA's approach for the survey and deflection of near-Earth objects, including a determination of the role of Arecibo, that was directed to be undertaken by the Fiscal Year 2008 Omnibus Appropriations Act, is completed.

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