

the result of concerns about availability of Soyuz vehicles to ensure we can have crew access to the space station—and a crew escape capability should it ever become necessary for the crew to quickly return to Earth. While specific steps are being taken in other legislation to address this issue, which is outside the jurisdiction of the Commerce Committee, our bill will ensure we will retain the option, at least, to continue space shuttle flights for some period of time, should that prove to be necessary to ensure effective use of the space station. The bill ensures that such an option is preserved, at least until the end of April, next year, so that the new administration and the Congress will have time to consider the need or desirability of taking that step. And the bill includes a provision that will ensure the Congress will have the results of a study already under way within NASA, which would identify and quantify a range of options for continued shuttle operations over a range of time periods.

An important message this legislation is intended to send is that NASA should have the resources it needs to carry out the unique and valuable programs that it is asked to conduct for the American people. Those programs include a wide range of activity beyond human spaceflight. Space Science, such as carried out by the Hubble Space Telescope and the other Great Observatories, and the incredible success of Martian rovers and interplanetary probes, are not only exciting and thrilling to watch, but, like their human spaceflight counterparts, help inspire entire generations to pursue science, technology, engineering and mathematics in school—and help guarantee the Nation's strong leadership role in the global community of nations. NASA's Earth science programs provide answers about our own spaceship Earth that are essential to help us understand and use the resources our earthy home wisely and understand the true nature of our impact on the environment, and ways we can help mitigate those impacts responsibly.

Research in advanced concepts in aeronautics carried out by NASA plays a key role in ensuring the safe and efficient operations of our aviation industry, and in identifying the new technologies and systems that will drive the future developments of aeronautics systems and vehicles that we cannot even imagine today.

In short, the legislation provides a balanced level of funding and emphasis on all of NASA's key missions. To do all of these things, we have increased the authorized funding levels for NASA more than \$2 billion above the amount requested for fiscal year 2009. We do not do so with the expectation that such an increased level of funding will be able to be appropriated. We understand the fiscal challenges we all face and I am among those who has and will always stand for reducing the size of government and ensuring that the gov-

ernment moves more in the direction of doing only those things that cannot be done by the private sector.

I believe that what NASA does, when it works at the leading edge of science and exploration, is doing things that no other entity, public or private, can do. We must be sure to always be alert, however, for opportunities for NASA to help private and commercial entities use the new technologies and techniques developed in research to place themselves in a position to move into areas once seen as the purview of NASA—such as the commercial orbital space transportation system, intended to enable private entities to provide launch and cargo—and one day crew—delivery to and from the International Space Station. This legislation includes provisions to help ensure the expanded development of a commercial space industry that can effectively—and economically—operate in both low-earth orbit and eventually participate in the exploration of the Moon—and beyond.

I believe we need to view the funds authorized to accomplish NASA's objectives more as investments than simply expenditures. We have had 50 years of experience which demonstrates that money invested in NASA programs yields technology gains and scientific excellence that has provided massive returns on that investment. One doesn't have to look very far to see the benefits to mankind from those programs. To list them all—even the obvious ones—would take volumes.

In years past, there have been efforts by private economic experts to quantify the value returned to the economy of this Nation from the product of NASA research and exploration. Those estimates have ranged from \$7 to \$9 returned to the economy for every dollar spent by NASA. Such estimates are hard to prove beyond a shadow of doubt and are based on assumptions that mayor may not be valid. But even if they are wildly exaggerated, and the return on investment is only something like \$1 back to the economy for every dollar spent. How many government programs could one say that about?

I have described some of what I believe to be the very important and positive aspects of the legislation and the agency programs and initiatives it supports. We also have important and difficult issues that will need to be addressed which we have not been able to fully deal with in this bill. Many people are deeply concerned about the fact that, between the retirement of the space shuttle, planned for 2010, and the availability of the Ares 1 Rocket and the Orion Crew Exploration vehicle, there could be a 3- to 6-year gap, during which this nation would not have the capability to independently launch humans into space. That this period of time—however long it proves to be—would begin, under the present plan, precisely at the time we have finally completed the space station and it is

available for research and scientific uses, makes that gap even less acceptable. It makes little sense for us not to be able to get U.S. scientists and astronauts there to conduct the long-awaited research that can only be done in that unique microgravity environment.

As I mentioned we have attempted to address part of that problem in language and authorized funding that would accelerate the development of shuttle replacement vehicles. That addresses the “back end” of the gap. But I would like to have seen more flexibility in the bill to enable the assessment of other options, besides extension of the shuttle program, or even in combination with that, to develop alternative capabilities in the short-term. We were unable to preserve the flexibility we had started with in our reported bill during the preconfereencing and negotiations with the House leading to the agreement on the language we are presenting today. But I hope we will be able to more thoughtfully and fully address that issue as we begin next year to develop the next NASA Reauthorization Act.

I believe this legislation represents a strong and important message of support for ensuring the United States maintains its leadership position in space exploration. I remind my colleagues that the substitute amendment we are offering has been fully agreed to in advance by the House Science Committee, and the amended House bill can be swiftly accepted by the House when we return it to them, and sent to the President before this Congress adjourns for the year. I urge my colleagues to support passage of our substitute amendment to the House bill.

GREAT LAKES LEGACY REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2008

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 6460, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 6460) to amend the Federal Water Pollution Control Act to provide for the remediation of sediment contamination in areas of concern, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a Levin amendment, which is at the desk, be agreed to, the bill, as amended, be read a third time and passed, the motions to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate, and that any statements relating to the bill be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 5649) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To limit the duration of reauthorization)

Strike section 3(f) and all that follows and insert the following: