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September 17, 2007

Senator Barbara Mikulski
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Sen. Mikulski:

NASA announced Friday a cut back on the plans for science on the Mars Science Laboratory mission. The cut-back affects five of the eight science instruments. The losses are:

1. Elimination of the descent camera
2. Elimination of zoom capability on the rover's mast camera
3. Elimination of the rock grinding tool (replacing it with a brushing tool)
4. Cessation of funding for the Laser-Induced Remote Sensing for Chemistry and Micro-Imaging
5. Constraints that may lead to descopeing of capability on
 - a. Sample analysis of the Instrument Suite, and
 - b. the Chemistry and Mineralogy X-Ray instrument

This is a huge hit to mission capability caused by the cuts made to the planned NASA space science program. The loss of imaging is also a huge loss to the public interest. In fact, this is one of a series of hits made to Mars exploration in recent years. The hits include elimination of Mars mission and technology development in NASA's Exploration program, the reductions in development of post-2009 missions including Mars sample return, the cutbacks in research and analysis and astrobiology.

It is also a further cut-back to science, just at the same time that science is providing extraordinary and positive results for the public interest in space exploration. These include the spectacular exploration by Spirit and Opportunity on Mars, and by Cassini in orbit around Saturn.

We urgently request you to ask NASA to delay implementation of Mars Science Laboratory cut-backs until Congress can evaluate them in the context of the overall NASA budget.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Louis Friedman
Executive Director
The Planetary Society