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# Orlando Sentinel

August 10, 2025

<https://www.orlandosentinel.com/2025/08/10/commentary-if-congress-wants-to-win-the-space-race-it-must-protect-nasa-funding/>

## IF CONGRESS WANTS TO WIN THE SPACE RACE IT MUST PROTECT NASA FUNDING

By Robert Weiner and Coby Rinke

The Trump administration's [proposed budget](#) for 2026 understandably caused some alarm among residents near Florida's Space Coast, as it proposed cutting NASA's funding by more than \$6 billion, potentially [ending projects like](#) the Artemis launch tower, Artemis SLS rocket, and Orion spacecraft.

Fortunately, without congressional approval, a White House budget proposal is supposed to be just that—a proposal. And Congress wants to fund NASA. Unfortunately, the Trump administration is attempting a variety of strategies to circumvent Congress's [constitutional authority](#) and cut funding anyway. These include freezing \$100 million in funding, acting like cuts have already taken place, and encouraging NASA employees to quit or retire early.

Congressional representatives of both parties have made themselves clear: NASA's crucial work must continue. On July 14th, a Republican-led House Appropriations subcommittee released a [draft of a spending bill](#) for FY 2026 which kept NASA funding about the same as FY 2025. The equivalent Senate committee soon did [the same](#).

Despite this, the Trump administration [recently froze \\$100 million](#) meant for NASA's science program and plans to retroactively convert these cuts into a "rescissions" package to send to Congress for approval. The catch is that if Congress does not act by end of the current fiscal year (September 30th, 2025), the funding cuts become permanent.

The administration is therefore strongly [considering](#) introducing its rescissions request right before September 30th and hoping Congress does not have time to act before the deadline (this is called a "pocket rescission"). Needless to say, this strategy is [abnormal and possibly illegal](#).

Possibly even more concerningly, there is [evidence](#) some senior NASA officials associated with the Trump administration planned to move ahead with the proposed budget cuts without waiting for congressional approval.

Former Trump-appointed NASA Administrator Janet Petro expressed this sentiment [at a town hall](#) on June 25th. "We are aligning with the priorities set by the President and [OMB](#) while we await the confirmation of a new administrator," Petro said

The NASA Chief of Staff Brian Hughes, who [previously served](#) as a spokesperson for Trump's national security team, stated his intention even more explicitly. "If we were to wait for all of the Congressional process to unfold and get to final resolution to make any movements or do anything, it would probably be considered irresponsible," Hughes said.

It goes without saying that such actions are unconstitutional and dangerous. In the wake of these comments, over 70 Congressional Representatives sent a [letter](#) demanding that NASA leadership wait for congressional approval before instituting cuts. The signers included Darren Soto from Florida's 9th district, which includes eastern Orlando.

Lastly, DOGE has depleted NASA's workforce through its deferred resignation program, which provides monetary incentives for civil servants to quit. NASA revealed on July 26th that [nearly 4,000 employees](#), a shocking 20% of its workforce, took this option. [This includes over 2,000](#) GS-13 to GS-15 positions, some of the most experienced and highly ranked NASA employees. Politico reports 311 of these employees came from the Kennedy Space Center specifically.

While employees certainly left for a variety of reasons, it is very possible the looming threat of budget cuts played an outsize role.

The loss of this collective expertise could severely limit NASA's ability to achieve its scientific goals or reach the Moon or Mars. The loss of employees could also compromise mission safety, according to the nearly 300 NASA employees who signed a [declaration](#) protesting the administration's actions.

The future of NASA should be shaped by science and the democratic process, not by legally dubious executive overreach. The pocket rescission strategy should be challenged in court and ruled illegal, and Congress should take steps to protect NASA employees from DOGE and ensure NASA administrators are not cutting funding prematurely.

The cost of not doing so is not just Florida's Space Coast economy, but the future of humanity's quest to explore the stars, and NASA's mission to unlock the secrets of the universe "[for the benefit of all.](#)"

*Robert Weiner was a spokesman in the Clinton and Bush White Houses and spokesman/senior staff for Cong. Claude Pepper, John Conyers, Charles Rangel, Ed Koch, Sen. Ted Kennedy, and 4-Star Gen./Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey. He was also the spokesman for the House Government Operations Committee. Coby Rinke is a senior policy analyst at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions For Change Foundation.*

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