NASA's Mission to Planet Earth

Statement of NASA Administrator

Regarding Effects of Proposed Five Year, $2.7 Billion Reduction

The House of Representatives has approved a FY96 budget resolution which assumes a massive reduction over the next five years to NASA's efforts to study the Earth - Mission to Planet Earth. Such a cut would dismantle the national approach to U.S. global change research priorities established over the last three Administrations and undercut U.S. leadership in this important area of research. It would destroy this program's basic feature—comprehensiveness— and turn an integrated, global program into a series of disconnected and fundamentally less effective measurements. Worse still, it would condemn American scientists to pursuing an approach to environmental research which is more than a decade out of date.

The cuts would cripple the core of the program - the Earth Observing System (EOS) - the first integrated satellite and research system designed to observe the linkages among all the components of the Earth system—the land, oceans, atmosphere, ice sheets, and ecosystems. Understanding these linkages is the critical next step to unlocking the secrets of how the environment works and how it affects us all.

NASA's approach to EOS converges both scientific and practical interests. First, the same instruments will collect data of significant value to both communities, as demonstrated by more than two successful decades of Landsat information. Second, scientists recognize that they must be able to translate their research down to the regional level to truly understand global climate effects. Practical users need regional information, as well as its global context. Most importantly, the EOS data will be used to forecast the climate - a year in advance at first, then progressively longer. The ability to make reliable regional and global climate forecasts will have a profound impact on society. Such forecasts are key to major improvements in agricultural and urban planning, water and forest management, investment and capital decisions, and fishing, all of which fundamentally affect U.S. competitiveness. They would also enable improvements in our ability to predict and react to natural disasters, like floods and hurricanes, thereby preventing greater loss of life and property. All of these gains would be lost if the proposed cuts to EOS are sustained.

The U.S. government - in partnership with scientists, private companies, and other nations - must ensure that this cutting-edge research that is the foundation of Mission to Planet Earth is continued. Government leadership in this science and technology innovation is the key to enabling the broad commercial contributions, foreseen by many, in the environmental field and realizing numerous benefits for science, commerce, and policy. NASA has

always been at the forefront of such advances in knowledge and we stand committed to this effort.

By walking away from the systematic and comprehensive approach for Mission to Planet Earth, the U.S. would also give up its undisputed world leadership in Earth observations, jeopardize technologies which will be critical to the growing commercial remote sensing market, and reduce our ability to influence the global environmental agenda. Significant U.S. investment in environmental science is the key to preserving this impartiality among nations and sustaining U.S. economic competitiveness in the global marketplace.

We at NASA are all committed to prudent and permanent deficit reduction. Recognizing our fiscal responsibility, NASA has already made enormous reductions in our future budgets. However, further cuts to Mission to Planet Earth - and environmental research in general - seriously jeopardize an investment in the future that will return economic and quality of life benefits far in excess of what we spend today.