DANA ROHRABACHER
46th District, California

Committees:
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Ranking Republican, Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights and Oversight
Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, and the Global Environment
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2300 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515–0546
(202) 225–2415 FAX: (202) 225–0145

DISTRICT OFFICE:
101 Main Street, Suite 380
Huntington Beach, CA 92648–8118
(714) 960–6483 FAX: (714) 960–7806

South Bay: (310) 377–9493

http://rohrabacher.house.gov

June 20, 2007

Hon. Mark Udall
Chairman, Subcommittee on Space & Aeronautics
Committee on Science and Technology
B-374 Rayburn House Office Building
INSIDE MAIL

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Near Earth Objects (NEOs), including asteroids and comets are often ignored, yet pose a significant threat to our planet. According to a March 2007 NASA report entitled "Near Earth Object Survey and Deflection Analysis of Alternatives," NASA predicts there are 20,000 objects, each with the potential energy of 100 megatons of TNT or more, that can be considered "potentially dangerous objects." A 100 megaton collision event is predicted to cause a minimum of 50,000 fatalities.

At this time, our ability to discover and track such objects is woefully inadequate. NASA's current program, known as Spaceguard, has a goal of discovering 90% of NEOs with a 75,000 megaton potential (estimated to cause more than a billion fatalities). If this program is successful, it is estimated that only 35% of the 100 megaton objects will be found.

As a result in 2005 I sponsored H.R. 1022, the "George E. Brown Jr. Near-Earth Object Survey Act" which would substantially increase the program by requiring 90% of NEOs 140 meters and larger be cataloged within 15 years. The bill was passed as part of the 2005 NASA Authorization Act.

However, in a hearing earlier this year, NASA Administrator Michael Griffin testified that while he is concerned about the situation, NASA has no funds available to carry out a more extensive program than Spaceguard. In addition, the Arecibo Radio Telescope, a key resource needed to track NEOs, is on schedule to be shut down by 2011.

Taking the aforementioned factors into consideration, I respectfully request the Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee convene a hearing for the following purposes:

- To review the status of the Spaceguard program in terms of its ability to meet the goals of the Survey Act,
- To explore the impact the closing of Arecibo will have on current and future NEO programs,

- To ascertain what other resources may be brought to bear to achieve the object of the Survey Act,
- To determine future actions necessary to implement the Survey Act.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and your personal attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Dana Rohrabacher

Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress

CC: Congressman Ralph Hall,
Congressman Bart Gordon,
Congressman Tom Feeney.