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 government 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 preconferencing 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:

(f) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—Section 118(c)(12)(H) of such Act (33 U.S.C. 1268(c)(12)(H)) is amended—

(1) by striking clause (i) and inserting the following:

''(i) IN GENERAL.—In addition to other amounts authorized under this section, there is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this paragraph $50,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2004 through 2010.''; and

(2) by adding at the end the following:

''(iii) ALLOCATION OF FUNDS.—Not more than 20 percent of the funds appropriated pursuant to clause (i) for a fiscal year may be used to carry out subparagraph (F).''.

(g) PUBLIC INFORMATION PROGRAM.—Section 118(c)(13)(B) of such Act (33 U.S.C. 1268(c)(13)(B)) is amended by striking ''2008'' and inserting ''2010''.

SEC. 4. RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM.

Section 106(b) of the Great Lakes Legacy Act of 2002 (33 U.S.C. 1271a(b)) is amended by striking paragraph (1) and inserting the following:

''(1) IN GENERAL.—In addition to any amounts authorized under other provisions of law, there is authorized to be appropriated to carry out this section $3,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2004 through 2010.''.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill (H.R. 6460), as amended, was read the third time and passed.

NATIVE AMERICAN HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND SELF-DETERMINATION REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2007

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Indian Affairs be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 2786, and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2786) to reauthorize the programs for housing assistance for Native Americans.

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

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that a Dorgan substitute 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. 5647) was agreed to.

(The amendment is printed in today's RECORD under ''Text of Amendments.'')

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill (H.R. 2786), as amended, was read the third time and passed.

AUTHORITY TO REQUEST RETURN OF PAPERS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Secretary of the Senate be authorized to request the return of the papers on H.R. 3068 from the House of Representatives.

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

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TRIBUTE TO SENATORS

WAYNE ALLARD

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, today I wish Senator ALLARD well as he leaves the Senate, after 12 years here and 6 years in the other body. That is a long record of honorable service to the wonderful State of Colorado. During our time together in the Senate, I was very pleased to work with Senator ALLARD on a critical issue facing both our States: chronic wasting disease. I appreciated his commitment to fighting the spread of CWD, which was characteristic of his commitment to the people of Colorado throughout his time here. I wish him all the best as he leaves the Senate, and I thank him for his years of dedicated service to our country.

LARRY CRAIG

Mr. President, as Senator CRAIG retires from the Senate, I want to take a few moments to recognize him and thank him for his work on behalf of the people of Idaho. He devoted 18 years to serving the people of Idaho in the Senate, following 10 years of service in the House of Representatives. Senator CRAIG and I worked together in two very different, very important areas: protecting civil liberties and supporting America's dairy farmers. In both cases, he was dedicated to the best interests of the people of Idaho, and I am grateful for his efforts.

Senator CRAIG was a key member of the group of six Senators—three Republicans and three Democrats, including myself—who worked together to try to strengthen the protections for Americans' privacy rights in the Patriot Act reauthorization that we considered in the Senate during the 109th Congress. His willingness to work across party lines on that issue was commendable, and it was a critical boost to our efforts. Senator CRAIG understands the importance of protecting Americans' freedoms, and I applaud his commitment to these issues.

I also thank him for his consistent support of dairy farmers, another area where we frequently worked together. Senator CRAIG and I shared concerns about the impact of the Australia free trade agreement on dairy farmers, on the threat of unsafe importation of milk protein concentrates, and on nonfat milk price reporting errors.

Once again on these issues, Senator CRAIG put the needs of the people of Idaho first, and reached across the aisle to protect hardworking dairy farmers. After 28 years of service in Congress, Senator CRAIG is retiring from the Senate, and I wish him all the best. His hard work and dedication have made a valuable contribution to the Senate and to the American people.

PETE DOMENICI

Mr. President, today I thank Senator DOMENICI for his 36 years of service here in the Senate, longer than any New Mexican in the State's history. I have had the pleasure of serving with Senator DOMENICI on the Budget Committee, where his leadership has been a cornerstone of the committee's work for decades. I have always appreciated his willingness to listen to and accommodate different points of view through the years. I also thank him for his work on biennial budgeting, something I also strongly support and was proud to work on with him.

Senator DOMENICI's commitment to mental health parity is well known and deserves special recognition. It is fitting that, on the eve of Senator DOMENICI's retirement, the Mental Health Parity Act of 2008, which he worked on with Senators DODD, KENNEDY and ENZI, should pass the Senate. I was pleased to cosponsor this bill and look forward to it being enacted.

Finally, I thank Senator DOMENICI for his vote in support of the McCain-Feingold legislation when it passed the Senate in 2002. It was his support, along with 59 other Senators, that gave us that victory after a long fight to ban soft money. I will always remember and appreciate his support, and I wish him all the best as he retires from the Senate.

CHUCK HAGEL

Mr. President, today I recognize the work of an outstanding colleague, Senator CHUCK HAGEL. As he leaves the Senate, there are many things he will be remembered for, and I will add a few to that long list. I have had the pleasure of serving with Senator HAGEL on both the Foreign Relations and Intelligence committees, where I have seen what a thoughtful and dedicated public servant he truly is. He has been an outspoken and independent voice on foreign policy, and against the current Administration's reckless foreign policies, including the disastrous war in Iraq.

In our time serving together in the Senate, we have worked on a number of bills relevant to our work on the Foreign Relations and Intelligence committees. Senator HAGEL and I authored a bill to address the serious threat posed to our national security by gaps in our intelligence gathering. Building