

NASA spared cuts in US spending bill passage

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The US space shuttle Discovery prepares to launch in February. NASA has breathed a sigh of relief after Congress approved a government spending bill that secured \$18.5 billion for the US space agency, sparing it from the prospect of cuts.

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"We appreciate the work of Congress to pass a 2011 spending bill," NASA administrator Charles Bolden said in a statement after the passage of the bill Thursday, adding that it "gives us a clear path forward to continue America's leadership in human spaceflight, exploration and scientific discovery."

The bill, which was only passed after months of partisan bickering and negotiations, "lifts funding restrictions that limited our flexibility to carry out our shared vision for the future," Bolden noted.

The funding means [NASA](#) will "continue to aggressively develop a new heavy lift rocket, multipurpose crew vehicle and commercial capability to transport our [astronauts](#) and their supplies on American-made and launched [spacecraft](#)," he said.

The space agency is currently working on securing a robust US-funded and operated spaceflight program, as the end of the space shuttle program in June means astronauts will be relying on Russia's Soyuz craft for access to the [International Space Station](#) for years to come.

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