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February 4, 2002

Susan O'Keefe, Administrator  
National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
300 E St. SW  
Washington, D.C. 20546

Dear Mr. O'Keefe:

One week ago today I quietly observed the anniversary of the Challenger accident. On that day in 1986, I was standing beside the flagpole in the press viewing area of the Kennedy Space Center and all of the students and teachers in my school back home were assembled in the gym to watch the televised launch. It seemed like we intimately knew the seven wonderful members of the Challenger crew and felt like we had trained right along with them. Christa McAuliffe had focused national attention on the importance of teaching and the legacy of public education. We were excited, energized, and joyful. The Teacher in Space program connected America's school children and educators with space exploration and captured the nation's imagination like no other event save the landing on the moon.

We were devastated by the accident.

We wondered what lessons our students would learn from such an historic tragedy. Would NASA pick up the pieces and boldly fly again? Would NASA once again spark the imagination of our school children and energize educators across the land? Would educators support space exploration and encourage their students to "reach for the stars"?

Right after the accident while viewing the McNeil-Lehn Newshour, I remember hearing NASA Administrator Fletcher say that NASA had a continuing commitment to fly one civilian, Barbara Morgan, the eighth member of the Challenger crew.

Sixteen years later educators and Barbara Morgan are waiting for NASA to honor that commitment.

Sixteen years later and NASA has sent John Glenn into space while debouring teacher Barbara Morgan into the astronaut training corps. Sixteen years later and two billionares have purchased tickets into space while Teacher-Astronaut Barbara Morgan remains on the ground. Sixteen years of waiting, and training, and working, and advocating, and teaching, and serving as a NASA ambassador, and meeting every NASA challenge, and Barbara Morgan still is earthbound. Sixteen years later and America's teachers are waiting.

We're tired of waiting.

In his State of the Union address President Bush pledged to find ways to attract more teachers to the profession and to make sure there will be a good teacher in every classroom. What better way to attract new teachers than to fly an education mission on the shuttle? It's time for Teacher-Astronaut Barbara Morgan to be sent on a mission into space. It's time for America to know of Barbara's loyalty and commitment to NASA and teaching. It's time to acknowledge Barbara's courage in the face of tragedy. It's time for teachers and students to learn that NASA honors its commitments. And it's time to emphasize the importance of the contributions that good teachers like Barbara Morgan make to this country every day.

When will Barbara Morgan fly?

Respectfully,



Kathy Phelan  
State Education Association President

Cc: US Senator Larry Craig  
US Senator Mike Crapo  
US Congressman Mike Simpson  
US Congressman Dutch Oiler  
Dick Kempthorne, Governor of the State of Idaho