

Keep Space Shuttle Discovery at the Smithsonian December 2025

Summary:

The Smithsonian Institution has owned and preserved the Space Shuttle Discovery since 2012. Discovery is held by the Smithsonian for the American people, and is one of the Institution's most visited artifacts. A forced relocation to Space Center Houston will cause significant and irreparable damage to the shuttle, waste taxpayer funds, and set a dangerous precedent - one where a small number of elected officials of any party could redistribute Smithsonian artifacts for political purposes, undermining the independence and integrity of the Institution.

We urge Congress to do any or all of the following:

1. *Preferred Option:* Exclude all funding for the relocation in the FY26 Commerce-Justice-Science (Funds NASA) and Interior (Funds Smithsonian) appropriations bills, and prohibit the use of NASA / Smithsonian funds for the relocation.
 - a. For example, an amendment to the House Interior appropriations bill ([H.R. 4754, Section 512](#)) was adopted in July by a [bipartisan voice vote \(4:15:20\)](#) by the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, with support from Rep. Morelle (D-NY), Rep Simpson (R-ID), Rep. Pingree (D-ME).
2. Specify an alternative spacecraft for transfer to Houston - any flown spacecraft, including Mercury, Gemini, Apollo, Dragon, Starliner, or (post-Artemis II) Orion capsules, would satisfy the OBBBA provision, provide a historic new exhibit at Space Center Houston, and be significantly easier and cheaper to move to Houston.
3. Require a formal NASA & Smithsonian report detailing the cost, logistics, and public benefit of relocating Discovery to Space Center Houston before any funds are appropriated, ensuring transparency and protecting taxpayer resources.

Why relocation is unacceptable:

- **Irreversible Damage to a Historic Spacecraft:** NASA and the Smithsonian have concluded that Discovery would need to be cut open and disassembled to be relocated. The shuttle was never designed to be broken apart, and doing so will cause irreparable damage to the shuttle's black thermal tiles, miles of complex wiring / conduits, and other components, which NASA uniquely preserved on Discovery as a tool for future aerospace researchers and designers.
- **No Feasible Transport Option:** NASA's two heavily modified Boeing 747 Shuttle Carrier Aircraft were retired nearly 15 years ago and are now inoperable museum displays. Moving Discovery by barge from DC to Houston would first require a 25+ mile overland tow through Northern Virginia, requiring substantial infrastructure modifications, escorts, and local / state permits that would be logistically daunting and publicly disruptive – [as evidenced by the 12 mile tow of another space shuttle through Los Angeles in 2012](#).
- **Cost Overruns Are Certain:** NASA and the Smithsonian estimated that the lower bound cost of the relocation alone is \$120M to \$150M, far exceeding the \$85M authorized by the OBBBA.
- **Public Access Would Decline:** The Smithsonian does not charge for tickets, whereas Space Center Houston [charges \\$30+ per person](#). A family of four's cost would increase by over \$100 to see an iconic piece of American history.

Contact: For background materials, expert introductions, and other information, please reach out to KeepTheShuttle at info@keeptheshuttle.org