

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration

Office of the Inspector General
Washington, DC 20546-0001



February 14, 2003

Admiral Harold Gehman, USN (ret.)
Chairman
Columbia Accident Investigation Board
Houston, Texas 77058

Dear Admiral Gehman:

At the February 12, 2003, Congressional hearing on the Columbia accident, members of NASA's oversight committees expressed concern that the membership of the Board and its charter could limit the Board's ability to carry out its duties with independence and objectivity. In response to the concern expressed at the hearing, the NASA Administrator amended the Board's charter to expand your flexibility and remove any inference of NASA oversight.

In order to assist you and the Administrator in ensuring that the Board's activities are independent, here are some general ideas for your consideration. These could be worked into the guidelines section of the charter, any further amendment of the responsibilities listed in the charter, or in a letter summarizing your interpretation of the Board's responsibilities under the charter.

- The Board will add members and use independent technical expertise as necessary to reach independent conclusions and recommendations.
- The Board will not be subject to supervision by the Administrator or any employee of NASA. Neither the Administrator nor any delegate of the Administrator will prevent or prohibit the Board from initiating, carrying out or completing any task regarding the investigation of the Columbia accident.
- The Board shall have access to all records, reports, audits, reviews, documents, papers, recommendations, or other material available to NASA programs and operations that are relevant to the investigation of the Columbia accident.
- In considering all causes of the accident, the Board will review NASA budgeting and management to determine whether an environment could have existed that did not maximize human space flight safety.

I am prepared to discuss these suggestions or any other matter as the Board deliberates how it can effectively accomplish its mission in a technically sound and independent manner.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert W. Cobb".

Robert W. Cobb
Inspector General

cc: NASA Administrator