Honorable William P. Clements, Jr.
State of Texas
Office of the Governor
Austin, TX  78711

Dear Governor Clements:

Your April 28, 1989, letter to President Bush regarding the historical significance of the planned modifications to the Mission Control Center (MCC) at NASA’s Johnson Space Center has been referred to NASA for response.

We share fully your concerns and those of the National Park Service and historic preservation societies that all feasible alternatives be explored for preserving as a national historic landmark the facility from which the world’s first manned lunar landing missions were controlled. I believe that through the cooperation of NASA, the National Park Service and Congress, as well as the State of Texas and other interested groups, we can preserve for future generations the historic essence of the Mission Operations Control Room. However, we are also responsible to the Nation to operate this control center for present and future space programs. We cannot fulfill this responsibility unless we continue the practice that has existed since the inception of Mission Control of modifying and improving the facility to meet changing mission needs and to incorporate vital new technologies.

In striking an appropriate balance between preserving our history and maintaining a strong, competitive American space program, we must recognize that even before the Apollo program ended we had begun modifying the control center to meet changing mission demands and to take advantage of improved technology. Since the historic Apollo 11 mission and before the facility was designated a National Historic Landmark on December 24, 1985, every console in the Control Center had been removed, stripped of all components, and rebuilt. Vacuum-tube electronics were replaced with solid-state, computers were changed out, rear screen projection systems were replaced, support room walls were moved, and control room color schemes (walls, carpets, and consoles) were changed from green to brown. Console layouts and operator positions have changed continuously; almost on a mission-by-mission basis, since 1964 when the Houston facility was first used to control the historic Gemini 4 flight, which included the first spacewalk by an American astronaut.
Despite all these changes, the awesome sense of history that draws more than a million visitors a year to the Houston Center has not been diminished. In fact, it has been enhanced by the visitor's realization that momentous events have been and continue to be directed from Mission Control. Changes to Mission Control actually became part of its heritage and contribute to maintaining it as a living institution. Only relics and dead institutions can be preserved in some final architectural and functional state, and I'm sure all would agree that Mission Control is far more important to the Nation and to Texas as a living historic institution.

The continuing process of changing and updating Mission Control is vital to present and future Space Shuttle operations and to the eventual support of Space Station Freedom. The contemplated changes will inevitably lead to a facility with internal features that are different in function and appearance from the original Apollo design. Although changes occur, the facility will retain its identity and will be readily recognizable, inside and out, as having evolved from the original Apollo design.

Again, we recognize and share your concern and desire that the heritage of Apollo be preserved as fully and reasonably as possible. To this end we have maintained a complete photographic record of the Apollo control room structure, utilities, configuration, flight control systems, control consoles, and visual displays. Further, we are retaining original equipment such as console shells and display panels, as they are replaced by newer equipment so it will be possible to replicate the original room.

Since the Mission Control Center operates as an integrated whole facility with common support areas, it would not be possible to isolate the former Apollo flight control room and remove it from service without substantially duplicating its functions by constructing a further addition to the Mission Control Center. The cost to do this would be prohibitive for NASA.

We agree that the Johnson Space Center is the appropriate location for a replica of the Apollo control room. Replication with private funds through efforts of the Texas State Historical Preservation Office is one viable option. Another replication concept which we will explore is to include it in Phase II of the recently planned, privately funded Space Center Houston public visitor center scheduled to open in 1991.
I am enclosing a detailed account of proposed changes to the Mission Control Center, and will be happy to provide any information you desire.

Please let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Richard H. Truly
Acting Administrator

Enclosure