



May 8, 2024

Dr. Heather Wilson  
President  
The University of Texas at El Paso  
500 W. University Avenue  
El Paso, TX 79968

Dr. Wilson:

As your federal, municipal, and county partners, we are writing to express our deep concern regarding your recent actions affecting the Aerospace Center at UTEP. Please understand that while we respect your autonomy regarding personnel matters under your purview, your actions have far reaching and, we believe, potentially negative consequences on our entire community. We urge you to reconsider your course of action.

We have expended considerable amounts of public funds, some expended and some committed, to ensuring the success of the region's aerospace and additive manufacturing initiatives. El Paso County and the City of El Paso, for example, have formed the development of a regional aerospace and defense manufacturing district that is being developed with help from the recently awarded \$40 million Economic Development Administration (EDA) Build Back Better Regional Challenge Grant and local matching funds provided by the City and the County. These initiatives are specifically dependent upon and made in reliance on our collaboration with UTEP's Aerospace Center.

We are extremely concerned with the announcement regarding the removal of Dr. Ahsan Choudhuri as the head of the Aerospace Center at UTEP. Dr. Choudhuri's involvement and leadership has been instrumental in moving this initiative forward. His removal will impact the economic future of our entire region and jeopardize a once-in-a-generation opportunity.

We cannot even fathom what would lead you to take such a negative action toward our community given that the National Science Foundation's Office of Inspector General investigation is ongoing. Dr. Choudhuri is not only the brainchild behind our region's aerospace and additive manufacturing initiatives (along with Dr. Ryan Wicker), but he is the named primary investigator on the application and the glue that is holding this groundbreaking regional initiative together. Any concerns on your part should have been addressed productively.

Dr. Choudhuri has propelled what was once a small program at UTEP into a multi-agency, multi-institutional, multi-governmental-entity collaboration with millions invested from all partners. He has transformed this partnership into one with the potential to change the economic landscape of this region, as well as the future of hundreds of thousands of El Pasoans toward upward social mobility. And you have removed him from this role.

We will schedule a meeting with you as soon as possible to discuss this action, as the implication of this decision has a significant economic and strategic long-term impact for our region.

The successful development of this initiative will change the lives of our constituents for the better. And Dr. Choudhuri is essential to its success. To say that Dr. Choudhuri's vision has been groundbreaking and innovative is an understatement:


- Dr. Choudhuri began at UTEP in 2003 with 3 students. He now employs between 130 to 190 students every semester. And today those first 3 students hold senior positions at NASA.
- His goal of preparing the next generation of engineers, scientists, and technicians our country needs in aerospace, defense, and energy, successfully aligned with his achievement in establishing multi-disciplinary teams and collaborations with government and industry partners in this effort.
- In 2015, his concept developed further, and he began to put into place the community's vision of establishing and using research preeminence as an engine for economic mobility and to transform the Paso del Norte region into an advanced manufacturing and knowledge-based economy.
- In 2023, the Aerospace Center had annual research expenditures of over \$11 million dollars.
- The economic development partnership that Dr. Choudhuri established has won significant investment from the federal government including through EDA's Build Back Regional Challenge Grant and the NSF's Regional Innovation Engine Grant.
- In 2023, federal funding from the EDA established the Innovation Factory at the El Paso International Airport, enabled the design work of the Advanced Manufacturing District and Tech1 additions at the Fabens airport, and expanded programmatic support to small and medium regional manufacturers, which enables them to compete in national aerospace and defense markets.
- He has leveraged the research and talent development of the Aerospace Center and its sister center led by Dr. Ryan Wicker, the W.M. Keck Center for 3D Innovation, to create jobs and business opportunities that will transform our region into an innovation powerhouse in aerospace, defense, and advanced manufacturing.
- He is a 9<sup>th</sup>-time recipient of the Millionaire Research Award and a member of the faculty with one of the highest grant-productivity in the university.
- He is trusted by all those he has established collaborative partnerships with.


This action does not reflect the collaborative effort that we have always had with UTEP. And this program doesn't affect just UTEP. Any decision regarding the Aerospace Center and its partners needs to take into consideration the economic and strategic future of El Paso and the surrounding region regarding space research and the future of space exploration. This action will delay and hamper our collective efforts and everything we have worked so hard to achieve thus far. Under your leadership this dream needs to materialize, and we need you to help our community, with Dr. Choudhuri's work, make it happen. Based upon our experience, we believe that Dr. Choudhuri is instrumental to our collective success.

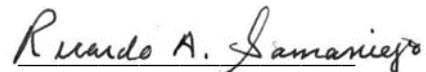
We have seen opportunities in the past pass us by and flourish in other communities because of the lack of vision, lack of will, or lack of cooperation among entities. This is the first time in our region's history where all the stars have been aligned. This project is a culmination of all those past and missed opportunities reborn at the right time, and with the right people at the helm. This is it. It is the rocket for our region.

We will contact you to set up a meeting at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

  
Oscar Leeser  
Mayor

  
Veronica Escobar  
Member of Congress

  
Ricardo Samaniego  
County Judge

CC: State Delegation

**Hand Delivered**