

Bush's space plan said in danger

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A large deficit in NASA's troubled shuttle program threatens President Bush's space exploration plan, it was reported Thursday.

The deficit could seriously delay or cripple the ambitious program unless the number of planned flights is cut virtually in half or the White House agrees to add billions of dollars to the U.S. space flight budget, the Washington Post said.

Sources familiar with ongoing negotiations between NASA and the White House say the administration has no intention of spending extra money to deal with a shortfall. Some space experts say the deficit could exceed \$6 billion from 2006 to 2010 when NASA plans to retire the space shuttle for good.

The cornerstones of the Bush initiative, announced in a speech on Jan.

14, 2004, are to use the shuttle to finish the international space station by 2010, develop the crew exploration vehicle by 2014, return humans to the moon by 2020 and eventually travel to Mars.

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