

Money issues, politics squeeze NASA

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The United States' space agency reportedly is facing tough times due to tight resources and the politics of the Bush administration.

While President George Bush said four years ago the United States would return to the moon by 2020, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration has been left in limbo as political stresses have combined with a scientific fight over the next space destination, the Houston Chronicle said Sunday.

Former astronaut Kathy Thornton is one of a number of scientific officials who want NASA to focus on a trip to Mars rather than a return voyage to the moon.

"There is value in going back to the moon as an outpost, as a research area," Thornton said, adding "We ought to move on (to Mars) and not get bogged down (on the moon) for all eternity."

A moon voyage would reportedly cost about \$230 billion during the next 20 years, while the space agency is also facing a major employment shakeup as it shifts to developing its new moon ship.

The Chronicle said the new focus is expected to leave 20 percent of the agency's federal and contractor work force, nearly 17,200 workers, unemployed or retired.

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