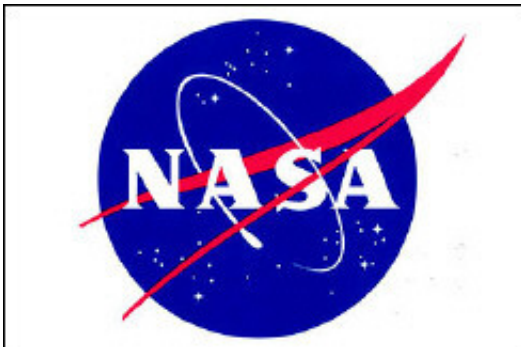


Obama revives capsule from canceled moon program

April 13 2010, By SETH BORENSTEIN , AP Science Writer



(AP) -- President Barack Obama is reviving the NASA crew capsule concept that he had canceled with the rest of the moon program earlier this year, in a move that will mean more jobs and less reliance on the Russians, officials said Tuesday.

The [space capsule](#), called Orion, still won't go to the moon. It will go unmanned to the [International Space Station](#) to standby as an emergency vehicle to return astronauts home, officials said.

Administration officials also said NASA will speed up development of a massive rocket. It would have the power to blast crew and cargo far from Earth, although no destination has been chosen yet. The rocket would be ready to launch several years earlier than under the old moon plan.

The two moves are being announced before a Thursday visit to Cape Canaveral, Fla., by Obama. They are designed to counter criticism of the Obama administration's space plans as being low on detail, physical hardware, and local jobs.

The president killed his President George W. Bush's [moon mission](#), called Constellation, as being unsustainable. In a major shift, the Obama space plan relies on private companies to fly to the space station. But it also extends the space station's life by five years and puts billions into research to eventually develop new government rocketships for future missions to a nearby asteroid, the moon, Martian moons or other points in space. Those stops would be stepping stones on an eventual mission to Mars.

First man-on-the-moon [Neil Armstrong](#), veteran Apollo astronauts and former senior NASA managers have been attacking the Obama plan - before the latest revision - as the death of U.S. leadership in space. Armstrong in an e-mail to The Associated Press said he had "substantial reservations" and more than two dozen Apollo era veterans signed a letter calling the plan a "misguided proposal that forces NASA out of human [space operations](#) for the foreseeable future."

Even with the revival of the Orion crew capsule, the overall moon return mission initiated by Bush - which involved a base camp - remains dead. And the revived Orion, slimmed-down from earlier versions, won't be used as originally intended, to land on the moon.

The capsule will be developed and launched - unmanned - on an existing rocket to the space station, said a senior NASA official who spoke on condition of anonymity so as not to detract from the presidential announcement. The Orion would remain at the space station and be used as an emergency escape ship back to Earth. That would mean NASA wouldn't have to rely on the Russian Soyuz capsule to return astronauts

to Earth.

Launching Orion on unmanned existing rockets - such as Atlas or Deltas - would save money and time.

The Obama plan also will speed up development of a larger "heavy-lift" rocket that would take cargo and crew away from Earth orbit to the moon, asteroids and other places.

Originally, Obama was proposing just spending billions of dollars on various research programs to eventually develop breakthroughs to make such trips cheaper and faster. Critics said that plan was too vague.

Now, the president is committed to choosing a single heavy-lift rocket design by 2015 and then starting its construction, officials said.

This shift by Obama means NASA would launch a heavy rocket years before it was supposed to under the old Constellation plan, the NASA official said. However, it will be different from the Apollo-like Ares V rocket that the Constellation plan would have used. Instead it will incorporate newer concepts such as refueling in orbit or using inflatable habitats, officials said.

Overall, the Obama program will mean 2,500 more Florida jobs than the old Bush program, a senior White House official said. In addition, the commercial space industry on Tuesday released a study that said the president's plan for private ships to fly astronauts to and from the space station would result in 11,800 jobs.

"We wanted to take the best of what was available from Constellation," the NASA official told The Associated Press as part of a White House briefing.

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