

Congress backs Obama plan on NASA's future

September 30 2010, By JIM ABRAMS , Associated Press Writer



In this image provided by NASA shows the view out of the Cupola window shows the Soyuz 23S, “Olympus” module docked to the nadir side of the International Space Station taken by astronaut Douglas Wheelock as the space station was passing over the majestic snow-capped Caucasus. The sun rising and reflecting off the Caspian Sea. (AP Photo/NASA - Douglas Wheelock)

(AP) -- Congress approved a blueprint for NASA's future Wednesday that extends the life of the space shuttle program for a year while backing President Barack Obama's intent to use commercial carriers to lift humans into near-Earth space.

The bill passed by the House on a 304-118 vote brings major changes to NASA's [space](#) agenda: It dismantles the Constellation program under which former President George W. Bush sought to return astronauts to the moon, and extends the life of the [International Space Station](#) from

2015 to 2020. The Senate passed the measure last month.

The bill relies mainly on the still-nascent commercial space industry to transport astronauts to the space station over the next five years. But in a nod to lawmakers concerned about NASA employees being laid off, it also continues to fund the shuttle program through the end of the current budget year a year from now. That would allow one last space shuttle mission following the mission planned for February.

[NASA administrator](#) Charles Bolden Jr. said the bill, which approves more than \$58 billion in spending over the next three years, would foster the president's goals of extending the life of the space station, launching a commercial space transportation industry, fostering new technology and creating thousands of new jobs.

Obama, in pushing for the end of the Constellation program, said it was implausible under current budget restraints and that NASA was siphoning off funds from other programs. He told NASA workers at Cape Canaveral, Fla., in April that he was committed to manned space flight and envisioned sending astronauts to near-Earth asteroids in the near future as a prelude to trips to Mars in the coming decades.

His plan met resistance from the space industry, former astronauts and lawmakers who said it was risky to put too much reliance on commercial flights while NASA develops a next-generation heavy-lift rocket to carry people to those asteroids and Mars.

The compromise bill approved by the Senate last month goes along with most of Obama's goals while extending the life of the shuttle and directing NASA to move immediately to develop the next heavy launch vehicle.

The chairman of the House Science and Technology Committee, Rep.

Bart Gordon, D-Tenn., said he was accepting the Senate version to ensure stability and clarity to the [NASA](#) workforce, but he had several concerns, including the cost of extending the shuttle program and the lack of a timetable for a government backup capability to commercial flights.

He said he would continue to press his views as the House determines actual spending levels for the 2011 fiscal year that begins Friday.

More information: The bill is S. 3729. Online: Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov>

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