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THE NATION

## 'Worlds Beyond' Are Goals of Bush Space Plan

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**A permanent lunar base would lead to a manned Mars mission and the start of 'a journey' across the solar system, the president says.**

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WASHINGTON — Seeking to reinvigorate America's space program, President Bush on Wednesday announced a new initiative to create a permanent base on the moon by 2020 and use it as a steppingstone to send astronauts to Mars.

Bush also urged the international community to join the endeavor to "extend a human presence across our solar system," calling it "a journey, not a race."

Speaking nearly one year after the space shuttle Columbia disaster that killed seven astronauts, the president called for retiring the shuttle fleet by 2010 and replacing it four years later with a crew exploration vehicle capable of transporting humans "beyond our orbit to other worlds."

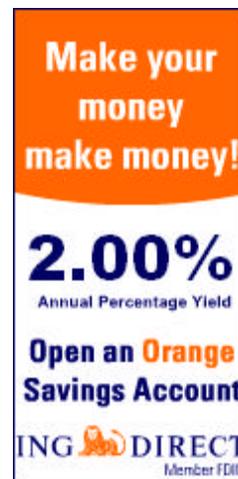
"We will build new ships to carry man forward into the universe, to gain a new foothold on the moon, and to prepare for new journeys to worlds beyond our own," he said.

Bush described the initiative during an 18-minute speech at NASA headquarters that was long on soaring rhetoric but short on specifics. In an effort to preempt critics who say the nation cannot afford the program, he downplayed the potential cost, saying that \$11 billion of the \$12 billion needed for the first five years would come from reallocation of existing NASA funds.

He said he would seek an additional \$1 billion from Congress over the next five years.

Neither the president nor NASA, however, identified which existing space initiatives would be cut to provide funds for the new one. The plan could run into turbulence in Congress as cutbacks to favored programs become known.

In the short term, the president's proposal will allow him to add a visionary element to his State of the



Union address Tuesday night before a joint session of Congress.

Bush's initiative — like the Iraq war that ousted Saddam Hussein — also represents another move toward completing his father's unfinished agenda. It was the elder President Bush who, in 1989, proposed a return to the moon and a first-ever manned mission to Mars. But that proposal received only tepid political support and soon faded.

Man last stepped on the moon in December 1972 as part of the Apollo 17 mission. The commander of that mission, Eugene A. Cernan, was in the audience Wednesday.

Bush said the United States would honor its commitment to its 15 partner countries to complete work on the international space station by 2010. After that, he said, the U.S. would refocus its space station research efforts to better understand — and overcome — the debilitating effects of long-term space travel on humans.

Under Bush's timetable, the current shuttle fleet would be retired at the end of the decade after almost 30 years of service and more than 100 flights. The shuttle's replacement would be developed and tested by 2008 and would conduct its first manned mission by no later than 2014.

Bush called for a return of humans to the moon "as early as 2015, with the goal of living and working there for increasingly extended periods." A White House statement set the deadline for a return to the moon as "no later than 2020." The timetable also calls for robotic missions to the moon by no later than 2008 to lay the groundwork for human explorations.

At some date after 2020, the nation would use its moon base as an assembly and launching site for a mission to Mars.

Under current plans, NASA's five-year budget totals \$86 billion — \$11 billion of which would be redirected to the new space plan. Bush said the additional \$1 billion he intends to seek, "along with refocusing of our space agency, is a solid beginning to meet the challenges and the goals we set today.... Future funding decisions will be guided by the progress we make in achieving our goals."

"We will begin the effort quickly, using existing programs and personnel," Bush added. "We'll make steady progress — one mission, one voyage, one landing at a time."

Initial reaction from members of Congress was generally positive, but many expressed concern over the program's eventual price tag — perhaps hundreds of billions of dollars — at a time when the country faces a deficit of about \$480 billion this fiscal year. Democrats were most vocal in questioning Bush's spending priorities.

"Those of us whose feet are planted firmly on Earth are alert to the fact that the promises of other bold presidential initiatives are going unfulfilled," said Rep. Tom Lantos (D-San Mateo). "Why is the No Child Left Behind program, which provided such hope just two years ago, now being deprived of the financial support needed to meet its goals?"

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) lavishly praised the initiative. "A national commitment to space is not a voluntary initiative — it is a strategic imperative," he said.

White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan said the initiative would not derail Bush's commitment to halve the federal budget deficit within five years.

Controversy seems inevitable when NASA Administrator Sean O'Keefe begins the task of taking from one space program to pay for another, as required by Bush's funding mechanism. As the Space Age has matured, many NASA programs — and the jobs they have generated — have acquired powerful patrons in Congress, who are likely to put up a fight.

In his remarks, Bush hailed the work done with robots, telescopes and unmanned space probes, including the Spirit rover that recently landed on the Red Planet.

But he added: "The human thirst for knowledge ultimately cannot be satisfied by even the most vivid pictures or the most detailed measurements. We need to see and examine and touch for ourselves. And only human beings are capable of adapting to the inevitable uncertainties posed by space travel."

During his remarks, Bush also recited a litany of "tangible benefits" from space exploration that have improved lives on Earth. Among them, he said, have been advances in medicine, weather forecasting, communications, computing, robotics, search-and-rescue technology and electronics.

Bush also announced the creation of a commission to advise NASA on the implementation of his initiative. It will be chaired by former Air Force Secretary Edward "Pete" Aldridge, who also was in the audience.

"We do not know where this journey will end," Bush said, "yet we know this: Human beings are headed into the cosmos.... We choose to explore space because doing so improves our lives, and lifts our national spirit. So let us continue the journey."

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Timetable

Projected dates in President Bush's space initiative:

**By 2008:** Develop and test a crew exploration vehicle to replace the shuttle.

**By 2010:** Complete work on the international space station. Retire the space shuttle fleet.

**By 2014:** Conduct first manned mission of replacement vehicle.

**2015-2020:** Return Americans to the moon with a goal of establishing a launch site for a mission to Mars.

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