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AP source: Obama to host Apollo 11 astronauts

By SETH BORENSTEIN (AP) – 3 days ago

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama will host the Apollo 11 crew on Monday, the 40th anniversary of man's first landing on the moon.

A senior administration official confirmed the plans to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they had not yet been announced.

The event is one of only two that will feature the entire Apollo 11 crew. The other is a lecture at the Smithsonian Institution Sunday night.

Two of the crew members, Neil Armstrong who took the first step on the moon, and command module pilot Michael Collins, do not make many public appearances. The second man on the moon, Buzz Aldrin, appears frequently in the media. Aldrin is 79; Armstrong and Collins are 78.

The astronauts are no strangers to presidents.

The Apollo 11 crew visited the White House five years ago and conducted an interactive chat on the Internet. In 1969, President Richard Nixon traveled to visit the crew while they were in quarantine aboard the USS Hornet in the Pacific Ocean.

Apollo 11 landed on the moon on July 20, 1969. The Apollo program cost \$25.4 billion at the time, which is nearly \$150 billion in current dollars. There were six landings, but man has not been to the moon since December 1972.

During his campaign, Obama recalled growing up in Hawaii and seeing Apollo crews return from splashing down in the Pacific Ocean.

Collins, who didn't get to land on the moon but circled it, said in a NASA press release this week that the view from space is something presidents and others should see for themselves.

"I really believe that if the political leaders of the world could see their planet from a distance of 100,000 miles their outlook could be fundamentally changed," Collins said. "That all-important border would be invisible, that noisy argument silenced. The tiny globe would continue to turn, serenely ignoring its subdivisions, presenting a unified facade that would cry out for unified understanding, for homogeneous treatment. The Earth must become as it appears: blue and white, not capitalist or communist; blue and white, not rich or poor; blue and white, not envious or envied."

One of the key words Collins uses to describe Earth is "fragile" and he said that 40 years later it is still fragile "and growing more so."

"When we flew to the moon, our population was 3 billion; today it has more than doubled and is headed for 8 billion, the experts say," Collins said. "I do not think this growth is sustainable or healthy. The loss of habitat, the trashing of oceans, the accumulation of waste products - this is no way to treat a planet."

For Aldrin, the big message he wants to convey these days is to explore space more. He understands NASA's desires to go back to the moon, but he would prefer to go to Mars or elsewhere, he told The Associated Press in June.

"Apollo is just the first effort of departing the cradle of Earth," Aldrin said.

For his part, Armstrong in a 2001 oral history for NASA recalled his time in Washington as a deputy associate administrator of NASA in charge of aeronautics:

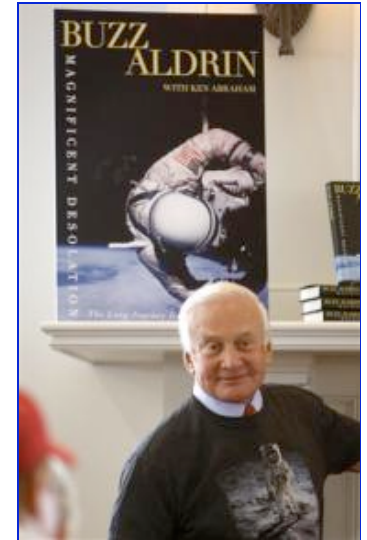
"I think everybody should have to go to Washington and spend a little time, just to see how difficult it is to run this country and do penance there," Armstrong said. "It's a frustrating place for me because so much coordination and greasing the skids goes on in Washington."

Associated Press writer Ben Feller contributed to this report.

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Apollo 11 astronaut Buzz Aldrin answers questions during a book signing Friday, July 17, 2009 in Dayton, Ohio. (AP Photo/David Kohl)



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