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Federal Eye

Keeping Tabs on the Government
by Ed O'Keefe

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Eye Opener: Funding NASA's future



NASA will sell its 1970s-era spaceships once retired from service in the coming years. (AP)

Updated 11:58 a.m. ET

Happy Friday! Or maybe not, if you work for NASA or dream of going to the moon.

President Obama's budget set for release on Monday effectively proposes the end of the agency's planned [Constellation Program](#) to send Americans back to the moon by 2020.

Or, in the words of the [the Orlando Sentinel](#), "There will be no lunar landers, no moon bases."

That's because Obama's proposed budget adds [\\$6 billion over the next five years to NASA's budget](#) to help extend the life of the International Space Station to 2020. But most of the funds would bankroll the private construction of spaceships that can ferry astronauts into space, [the White House said Thursday](#).

"My initial impression is that this is a real significant indication of support for NASA in a time of tight budgets," former astronaut [Sally Ride told Bloomberg News](#).

The New York Times reports, however, that [the changes have angered some lawmakers](#) from Texas, home of the Johnson Space Center, and Florida, the location of the Kennedy Space Center.



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"If early reports for what the White House wants to do with NASA are correct, then the president's green-eyeshade-wearing advisors are dead wrong," Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) said in a statement. "And I, for one, intend to stand up and fight for NASA, and for the thousands of people who stand to lose their jobs."

"It is simply unacceptable and I will fight back, along with my colleagues from both parties, to maintain a robust space program and to preserve as many Space Coast jobs as possible," said Rep. **Suzanne Kosmas** (D-Fla.), whose district is home to thousands of NASA employees, their families and space contractors.

Advocates for commercial space flight said they could help preserve or create those jobs.

"NASA investment in the commercial spaceflight industry is a win-win decision," said **John Gedmark**, executive director of the [Commercial Spaceflight Federation](#). The plan "will create thousands of high-tech jobs in the United States, especially in Florida, while reducing the spaceflight gap and preventing us from sending billions to Russia."

And if commercial space flight companies don't create jobs, [local news reports](#) suggested Thursday that Obama's announcement of billions of dollars in federal stimulus dollars for new high-speed rail projects might help spur economic growth in Florida.

Meanwhile, NASA's mission continues on other planets and here on Earth. Scientists said this week that [the Mars rover Spirit has ended its six-year mission](#). The agency has also [deployed a radar-equipped jet to Haiti](#) to produce 3-D maps of the deformation caused by the recent earthquake and aftershocks there.

Leave your thoughts in the comments section below

In other news...

- **The Revolving Door:** Senators are scheduled to vote for cloture on Monday for **M. Patricia Smith** to serve as solicitor of labor and **Martha Johnson** to serve as administrator of the General Services Administration, according to aides for Majority Leader **Harry M. Reid** (D-Nev.). Track all Obama nominees with The Post's [Head Count](#).

- **Cabinet and Staff News:** President Obama holds his first Cabinet meeting of 2010 this morning and later meets privately with Treasury Secretary **Timothy Geithner**. First Lady **Michelle Obama** aims to [trim obesity](#). Federal Reserve Chairman **Ben Bernanke** (phew!) [wins Senate confirmation](#). Secretary of State **Hillary Rodham Clinton** [eases up pressure on China](#) over the Internet. White House Cybersecurity Czar **Howard Schmidt** [answers his doubters](#). Supreme Court Justice **John Paul Stevens** [renews his criticism of gerrymandering](#). The tale of [two intelligence directors](#). Foggy Bottom deploys a "sports envoy" to Taiwan. In new memoir, former Treasury Secretary **Hank Paulson** [defends](#) the bank bailout.

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT:

- **On issue of gays in military, Pentagon will make recommendations to Congress:** The Pentagon has been studying ways to integrate gays into the military, and for the first time will [offer recommendations to Congress next week "on a way forward."](#)
- **Army to delay sanity hearing on Hasan:** Prosecutors had planned to conclude the hearing, [known as a sanity board](#), by the end of February. But on Wednesday, the Army granted a defense motion to delay the process until after a preliminary hearing in the case.

- **U.S. to repay veterans in debt case:** A federal judge in San Francisco on Thursday preliminarily approved a civil-court settlement in a case in which the government has agreed to [repay up to \\$10,000 each to 6,715 former members](#) of the armed forces.

FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION:

- **FDA urges drug makers to pay more attention to abuse potential:** The agency [released a draft of voluntary guidelines](#) to assist drug makers in figuring out which compounds should be placed under the Controlled Substances Act.

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GOVERNMENT WORK/LIFE/OPERATIONS:

- **Federalizing security contactors might make our country safer:** A GAO report examines the complex situation involving security at six Energy Department sites with "special nuclear material." [The sites themselves are run by outside contractors.](#)
- **Agencies need more flexibility to finance energy projects, experts say:** Agencies spent more than \$1.7 billion last year on energy-efficiency projects, [a dramatic increase from past years.](#)
- **Continuing resolutions could be on the horizon for agencies:** Federal program managers hoping for greater budget stability with Democrats controlling both the White House and Congress, consider yourselves forewarned: [Expect to enter the next fiscal year without a budget.](#)
- **Unions are anxious for details of spending freeze:** Leaders [expressed some apprehension](#) over the president's plans for a selective discretionary spending freeze and a commission to reduce the deficit.
- **Obama reiterates support for domestic benefits bill:** He said he [hopes Congress passes the legislation this year:](#)

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY:

- **Ex-FEMA worker pleads guilty to \$721K fraud:** Former employee **Lashonda Booker**, 35, and her cousin, **Peggy Hilton**, 36, were charged Jan. 8 with [conspiracy to commit mail fraud in a scheme to steal \\$721,000](#) that was meant for storm victims.

JUSTICE DEPARTMENT:

- **Feinstein says Obama should move terror trials from New York City:** the chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee is [the highest-ranking Democrat](#) to urge the administration to reverse course.

STATE DEPARTMENT:

- **The entire State Department budget is exempted from the spending freeze ... almost:** There is [exactly one section that will be frozen](#): The International Boundary and Water Commission, which promotes cooperation in managing shared water resources and the boundary between the U.S. and Mexico.
- **USAID program for Pakistani tribal areas making 'little headway,' audit finds:** The two-year-old development program for the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) was designed to help local authorities and private charities provide basic services. So far, [only \\$15.5 million has been spent on the initiative.](#)

TREASURY DEPARTMENT:

- **Treasury moves to tighten mortgage aid paperwork requirements:** The Obama administration says it will [tighten the documentation requirements](#) for borrowers applying for its marquee mortgage relief program.

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By Ed O'Keefe | January 29, 2010; 6:00 AM ET

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Comments

As a NASA member from the beginning and throughout the Apollo, SkyLab, and many other programs from 1958 - 1979, this may surprise you. I am not concerned as much for NASA as I am for national security. I remember all too well the shock of the first satellite in orbit, Sputnik from the USSR, and the great concern about what it would or could do militarily. The US responded immediately with Explorer 1 to at least level the playing field. Then, in an effort to provide positive leadership for the use of space, President Eisenhower decided that the US Space Program would be the primary provenance of a Civilian Agency - thus NASA was born.

So here we are, just 51 years later, with a resurgent Russia showing some of the old USSR belligerence -- and we will have to rely on them to shuttle astronauts to and from the International Space Station. At the same time, China is in space and India is getting very close.

Once we abandon "the high ground," we will be committing a huge military mistake, and we will be at the mercy of manned flights and satellites from any nation that can hitch a ride.

I fear it is a grave mistake to allow such a hiatus.

Posted by: coraltrace | January 29, 2010 1:30 PM | [Report abuse](#)

What a tragedy for manned space exploration. I wonder what REALLY is inhibiting a real commitment to getting out of Earth's gravity well? Is there something government officials know that they do not want to find out publicly? Otherwise its like Darwin deciding never to get off the Beagle and explore the Galapagos. Its scientifically incomprehensible and as noted above a national disgrace. Banks? Hundreds of billions. Space science? A joke. I hope Congress fights the administration tooth and nail over this one. Nothing pays back more than space science.

Posted by: GregorioWdeV | January 31, 2010 3:41 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Well, i don't like 70% of what Obama's administration is doing, but here I totally agree with it. Constellation is a waste of money and efforts. Using chemical engines to travel beyond LEO (low earth orbit) is wasteful and stupid. Nasa needs to sponsor development of advanced propulsion first - such as plasma and nuclear propulsion. Anything else means waste of taxpayers money.

Posted by: genus11 | February 2, 2010 3:42 PM | [Report abuse](#)

Forgot - one of the promissing technology is VASIMR or other plasma engines such as MIT's helicon plasma thruster. Energy source can be only Nuclear (Solid or Gas). Nothin else works at this stage.

Posted by: genus11 | February 2, 2010 3:44 PM | [Report abuse](#)

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