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[Obama budget to drop US return to Moon](#)

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President Barack Obama's 2011 budget, to be submitted to Congress Monday, will propose abandoning a program to return US astronauts [to the Moon](#), two [Florida](#) newspapers said.

Citing administration and NASA officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity, the reports said the White House would call on the US space agency to focus on other programs, including the development of commercial services to ferry US astronauts to the [International Space Station](#).

Florida Today and the Orlando Sentinel, two papers based in the area around the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, said Obama would seek to boost NASA's budget by six billion dollars over five years, despite a pledge to freeze most discretionary spending.

But the boost will fall far short of the money NASA needs to finance the Constellation program launched in 2004 by then-president George W. Bush after the [space shuttle Columbia](#) crash in 2003 effectively brought the shuttle program to a close.

Constellation envisioned the return of US astronauts to the Moon by 2020, with them then using Earth's nearest neighbor as a base for manned trips to Mars.

But the Bush administration did not set aside a sufficient budget to develop the program, according to the Augustine commission, a group of independent experts who examined the program at Obama's request.

The commission's report, released at the end of 2009, proposed a range of alternatives for the future of manned space travel.

The Obama administration's approach will give priority to development of a way to get US astronauts to the International Space Station after the US shuttle program winds down in September 2010. Astronauts will have access to Russia's Soyuz spacecraft until an alternative is available.

There are five more shuttle flights planned, all of them to the ISS, with the next scheduled for February 7.

The possibility of keeping the program running until 2015 has not been ruled out by the administration, officials said.

Reports said Obama's cut backs could face tough opposition, with a spokesman for Florida Democratic Senator Bill Nelson telling Florida Today the proposals could "decimate the space program."

A spokesman for Boeing, a key NASA subcontractor, said the company had not been advised about the

proposals and urged patience.

“This is the [first step](#), Congress will debate it, there will be a lot of hearings... before a final decision is made,” Edmund Memi told AFP.

(Source: AFP)

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