

New Plan For NASA Keeps Shuttles On The Job (For Now)

By Irene Klotz | Thu Jul 15, 2010 04:14 PM ET



A NASA oversight committee unanimously passed a plan to postpone the space shuttles' retirement and build a new U.S. launch system, while helping to develop commercial space taxis, though the private sector road to space would be funded at a fraction of the amount Pres. Barack Obama proposed in his controversial blueprint for the U.S. human space program.

SLIDE SHOW: For Space Shuttle Atlantis, the End is Here.

The plan leaves intact the White House's \$19 billion funding request for NASA for the year beginning October 1, but replaces the administration's push for new technology and commercial initiatives with a mix of programs intended to forestall the day when the United States will be without the capability of flying people in space, a consequence of retiring the space shuttles without having a replacement vehicle available.



WATCH VIDEO: Find out what it is like to be launch director at NASA.

The three-year NASA spending plan passed by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation on Thursday adds an additional shuttle mission to the International Space Station, to be flown next summer or fall, and leaves contracts, equipment and personnel in place in case other flights are

needed. Currently, NASA has two remaining shuttle flights to complete construction of the \$100 billion orbital outpost.

It also calls for a new heavy-lift launch vehicle and capsule capable of flying astronauts to asteroids and other destinations in deep space. Both the rocket and the capsule would draw heavily from heritage programs, including the space shuttle and the Constellation moon program, which Obama wants to cancel.

The Senate bill reintroduces several Constellation program components, including a “multi-purpose” spacecraft for human travel to asteroids and other destinations in deep space, and a launch vehicle capable of putting at least 70 tons into a low orbit around Earth. And it directs NASA to begin work on a heavy-lift rocket in 2011, rather than the 2015 time frame proposed by the White House.

The bill pares down Obama’s request for \$6 billion over five years to develop commercial spaceliners to fly astronauts to the station to \$1.6 billion over three years. Both plans budget about \$3 billion annually to continue the space station and \$5 billion annually for science.

The proposal now moves to the Senate committee that makes appropriations.

Image: The shuttle launches, again? (NASA)

SIGN UP FOR DISCOVERY NEWS DAILY

Email:
