

# Bush's Moon-Mars Mission: Will It Fly?

by Marsha Freeman

President George W. Bush followed in his father's footsteps, and announced on Jan. 15 a vision for NASA to return men to the Moon and build a base there, enabling a later manned mission to Mars.

Unquestionably, the agency has long been without a visionary plan for space exploration. Not only have space advocates and Congressmen pointed this out, but the Columbia Accident Investigation Board concluded that NASA's lack of a long-term plan contributed to the policies that led to the loss of the Shuttle one year ago.

On Jan. 14, President Bush stated four goals and objectives for his space exploration plan:

- to return the Space Shuttle fleet to flight as soon as possible, in order to complete construction of the International Space Station;
- to develop and test, by 2008, a new manned vehicle, to conduct its first mission of taking astronauts to the station by 2014; this Crew Exploration Vehicle would then evolve into the transportation for astronauts to the Moon;
- to begin, no later than 2008, a series of robotic missions to the lunar surface, with the start of extended human presence on the Moon as early as 2015;
- to use the experience and knowledge gained on the Moon, to "take the next steps of space exploration: human missions to Mars, and to worlds beyond."

The progression is right, to spread human civilization throughout the Solar System. The multi-decade plans formulated as early as the 1950s, and most eloquently described by Lyndon LaRouche beginning 1985, rested on a foundation of Earth-orbital infrastructure for transportation, research, and logistics; and the progression of manned missions from the nearby Moon, to distant Mars. The problem with the President's approach is that he is trying to fit a Solar System-sized vision for NASA, into a budget that does not even adequately support the infrastructure we already have in Earth orbit. Neither Bush, nor the people who advise him on economic policy, have the slightest idea of the seriousness of the current economic crisis, nor how to solve it. Their approach, if well-intentioned, is the wrong one.

## 'Retire' the Infrastructure?

The President has proposed that over the next five years, \$1 billion be added to NASA's budget, above the \$86 billion



*An idea whose time is overdue: In June 1985, Lyndon LaRouche first presented a comprehensive 40-year space exploration mission, in which re-exploration and industrialization of the Moon, is the springboard for human occupation of Mars orbit and travel to Mars' surface. LaRouche spoke (here with Helga Zepp-LaRouche) at a memorial conference for space pioneer Krafft Ehrliche, whose ideas fertilized the vision LaRouche presented.*

projected. This is about a 1% increase! Rather than increase the space budget, he suggests that \$11 billion of that projected \$86 billion should be "reprogrammed" from existing programs that are not part of the new "exploration" effort. This will require terminating some science and other programs, as well as some research aboard the International Space Station, and who knows what else. On Feb. 2, the Administration's FY05 budget request for NASA will spell out the details.

To provide the bulk of the funding that would be required to actually carry out this program—*after* this first five years (and after George Bush is out of the White House, even should he win a second term)—the plan is to "save money" by retiring the Shuttle and "backing away" from the space station. This is the antithesis of what it should be. These transportation and laboratory capabilities are the very foundation that will enable us to go back to the Moon. Although the Space Shuttle should be replaced by a more modern crew-transportation system, its function as cargo carrier is critical to take the freight needed on the Moon, to Earth orbit first.

Nor can the space station be seen as an expensive albatross around NASA's neck, and "backed away" from, but expanded to serve the multiplicity of purposes for which it was intended. Among these, it is a fuel and cargo depot, to service craft on their way elsewhere; an assembly and check-out facility for interplanetary spacecraft; a basic research facility to study the effects of weightlessness on physiology; and, a test bed for new technologies needed in the partial-gravity environments on the Moon and Mars.

There is no way to have a Moon/Mars mission "on the cheap." Space infrastructure is the key.