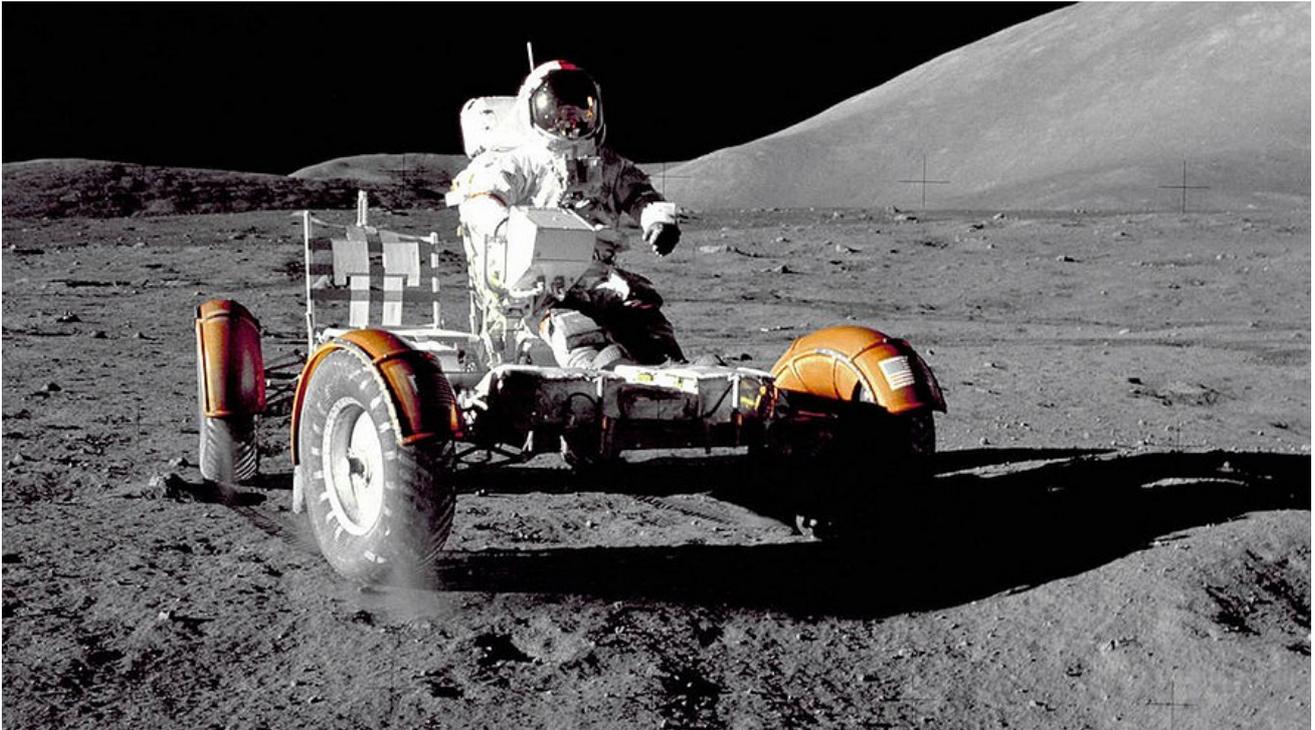


# Billionaires want to help Trump send rockets to the moon again

By Agence France-Presse, adapted by Newsela staff on 03.15.17

Word Count **917**



Apollo 17 mission commander Eugene A. Cernan makes a short checkout of the Lunar Roving Vehicle during the early part of the first Apollo 17 extravehicular activity at the Taurus-Littrow landing site. This view of the lunar rover prior to loadup was taken by Harrison H. Schmitt, Lunar Module pilot. Photo: NASA

Humans may soon be bouncing on the moon's surface again.

Former President Barack Obama dismissed the moon as a place explorers had already seen. Now, the moon has once again gained interest as a potential destination under Donald Trump's presidency.

This time, though, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) — a U.S. government organization that does space missions and space research — will be getting help from private companies.

Private companies are especially energized by the idea of future space exploration missions beyond Earth's low orbit, which is where the International Space Station circles the Earth.

Trump himself has said little about the subject. However, his close circle and some former NASA officials have made clear their interest in returning to the moon by partnering with private companies. In the past, space missions have been funded almost entirely by the government. Now, it is possible they will be paid for by private companies interested in making money from space.

## **Billionaires Are Space-Minded**

One such company is SpaceX, which is headed by a man named Elon Musk. Amazon founder Jeff Bezos also runs a rocket company called Blue Origin. Both of these billionaires have met with Trump's team several times since the Republican won the presidency.

"There is certainly a renewed interest in the moon in the Trump administration," said John Logsdon. He used to lead the Space Policy Institute at George Washington University.

Some of Trump's advisers worked on the Constellation program, which was created by former President George W. Bush. Its goal was to return humans to the moon for the first time since the U.S. Apollo missions of the 1960s and '70s. Since then, the United States has not been to the moon.

When he was president, Obama canceled the Constellation program. He said it was too expensive and the U.S. had already been to the moon. He opted instead to work toward new and unexplored destinations like an asteroid and, one day, Mars.

"The people advising Trump on space in a sense are still angry at that and believe it was a mistake," said Logsdon.

## **A Moon Mission In 2018?**

Logsdon believes that in the next year there could be another major plan to get the moon. However, Trump and his associates must first get out of their "current chaos" and decide where government money will go.

Eric Stallmer agreed that a moon mission is likely. He is president of the Commercial Spaceflight Federation, which promotes the idea of spaceflight operated by private companies.

NASA's current focus is on developing what will be the world's most powerful rocket, known as the Space Launch System. Its new capsule, Orion, will take off to deep space. Hopefully one day it will be carrying people around the moon, to an asteroid, or even to Mars by the 2030s.

Stallmer described this program as "very expensive." He says the government must partner with companies to get to the moon, or else it will be too costly.

## **NASA Partners With Private Businesses**

Since the U.S.-run space shuttle program ended in 2011, NASA has forged partnerships with private industry, including SpaceX and Orbital ATK. In turn, these companies have helped maintain the International Space Station. The space station was launched in 1998 as a way for humans to study space and conduct experiments.

SpaceX plans to start sending astronauts to the space station as early as 2018.

"These are very exciting times," said Stallmer.

SpaceX said last month it had signed its first contract to send two space tourists on a trip around the Moon at the end of 2018. However, it did not give many details, such as the cost of the trip or the identities of the travelers.

SpaceX has also vowed to send an unmanned spacecraft on a journey to Mars in 2018. It will be the first step before they send humans to Mars, the company said.

## **No Public Announcement Yet**

The proposal to get humans to the moon has not been made public. Only Trump, NASA, and some officials government know the true plan.

"It is time for America to return to the moon — this time to stay," Bezos was quoted as saying in an email to the Post.

"A permanently inhabited lunar settlement is a difficult and worthy objective. I sense a lot of people are excited about this."

Oklahoma Republican lawmaker Jim Bridenstine has told Trump he wants to be the next leader of NASA. Bridenstine has praised cooperation between the U.S. space agency and private industry. He called for a moon return mission as a way to boost needed resources on Earth, such as water.

Research has shown billions of tons of water ice can be found at each lunar pole.

## **Moon Resources Could Aid Space Missions**

Water and resources from the moon could be used to repair satellites and spacecraft that are already in orbit, Bridenstine said in a blog post in December.

"Government and commercial satellite operators could save hundreds of millions of dollars by servicing their satellites with resources from the moon," Bridenstine wrote. Many satellites orbit Earth, beaming cellular signals so we can use internet, television, and cellphone networks.

The moon's soil is also believed to be rich in precious metals, such as gold, platinum, cobalt and tungsten.

The Google Lunar XPrize Foundation recently devised a competition. The contest was to create robots that successfully land on the moon. It recently announced five finalist teams for the competition. The winner can take home a \$20 million prize.

**Quiz**

- 1 Which section of the article explains how space travel could be profitable for the United States?
  - (A) "A Moon Mission In 2018?"
  - (B) "NASA Partners With Private Businesses"
  - (C) "No Public Announcement Yet"
  - (D) "Moon Resources Could Aid Space Missions"
  
- 2 Select the paragraph from the section "A Moon Mission In 2018?" that explains why private companies must work with NASA on future missions.
  
- 3 Based on the section "No Public Announcement Yet," what is the MOST important reason why Bezos wants his company to partner with NASA on a moon mission?
  - (A) to profit from the fame a moon mission would create
  - (B) to examine the resources that could be mined from the moon
  - (C) to research the possibility of settling humans on the moon
  - (D) to analyze the composition of the water ice at the lunar poles
  
- 4 The author MAINLY explains the importance of space agencies and space travel by:
  - (A) listing various space missions that should occur in the near future
  - (B) explaining exactly how much money the government spends on space missions
  - (C) describing in detail the proposal to send humans on a mission around the moon
  - (D) discussing the pros and cons of spending money on space missions