NASA Space Station Budget May Be Slashed

By Russell Marcus

WASHINGTON

President Clinton's new budget will cut funding for NASA's planned space station by 40 percent, triggering yet another major restructuring to simplify and delay the project, sources said.

Key Capitol Hill aides and others close to the program said the White House budget, submitted Monday, would reduce the estimated $2.25 billion NASA requested last year, instead of the $1.55 billion NASA requested. White House officials would neither confirm nor deny those figures.

Clint Clinton, chair of the White House with Democratic congressional leaders, said that although he supported the space station during his campaign, he was troubled by the massive cost overruns associated with the project. According to one member, "He would have a very difficult time coming before Congress and asking for more funding." Sources said the arrangement, being referred to as "the 60 percent solution," was hatched in talks between this White House administration and NASA last March. It would allow the project to press ahead while halving the department's long-term commitment.

But Reno's most striking attribute, many of them said, is her shrewd political skill — an asset that has enabled the 54-year-old Harvard Law School graduate to repeatedly win lapsed elections with substantial support among Miami's diverse ethnic communities.

"Jen Reno is one of the most political figures in the state of Florida," said H.T. Smith, a prominent black Miami lawyer who was chosen as one of the state's most vocal critics. "She returns every phone call. She's all over the community. People feel if they have a problem, they can speak to her. I was one of her strongest critics, and in the past few weeks, I've been very pleased with her actions." Smith noted, "I'm her biggest fan." Reno has played a part in her successful campaign for the position. She has been a 12-year member of the Black Law Enforcement Officers Association, a 238-lawyer, $33 million-a-year unit that is one of the largest in the country. Her relationship with the black community was strained for years by her failure to crack down on illegal drug activity and was slow in improving and promoting minorities.

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"Every time you turn around, somebody's going to be looking for a reason to criticize her performance," said Smith, who added, "I will be doing the same thing." Smith, who had been a vocal critic of Reno's during the campaign, said he was pleased with the way she handled the job. Reno, who is not married and has no children, is expected to be named attorney general by President Clinton, who was in the White House for his inauguration ceremony.

As Smith's comments suggest, Reno has a history of being a controversial public figure. She was arrested in the early morning hours, particularly over inhaled sections. Low $37° F (°C) 21° C 10° C. Low 37° F (°C) 21° C 10° C.

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By John Lancaster

WASHINGTON

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