

# Stafford's vision

General discusses  
future of space program

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City Editor

The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Apollo 11 landing and the historic moon walk has put space exploration back in the spotlight this week, and General Thomas P. Stafford was on hand Wednesday to talk about the future of NASA and the proposed "Constellation" program, which would put man back on the moon and open the door to the exploration of Mars.

After several stops around the country, including Capitol Hill where he spoke to congress about the importance of a solid space program, the General spoke to visitors and media at the Stafford Air and Space Museum.

"It's all been outlined in the Constellation program, which would include a few trips to the moon, then to Mars," Stafford said. "It's a report on how this could be done in a safer and more cost effective



Julie Harding/WDN

**General Thomas P. Stafford shows Channel 9 reporter Jon Jordan the space suit he wore when he and his Apollo 10 crew set the world record for speed four decades ago.**

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## Stafford

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manner."

Stafford said it would be very difficult to gain the same momentum and optimism experienced by the Apollo program in a country that seems to have lost its love of exploration – as well as its enthusiasm and spirit.

"Let's look at it this way," Stafford explained. "We did the whole thing (Apollo program) from scratch in eight years and two months. We set the goals and we put a man on the moon in that short a time. 9/11 happened about eight years ago, and we still have a hole in the ground. Has America lost its spirit? Has it lost its way? If we still had that passion, we would be on Mars."

Many Americans believe there are more important ways to spend money over the next several years, especially in this time of economic turmoil, but Stafford said funding the Constellation program would be minimal.

"The amount you spend on NASA and space exploration is small compared to the federal budget," Stafford said. "But the benefits are there."

Stafford said most of the technology we use today is a result of our pursuit to put a man on the moon.

"Our country has lived off the technology created during the Apollo program," he explained. "Electronics, bio-medicine, computers, cell phones – all these things started there."

Stafford admits the Apollo program came at a rare time in history, when all the ingredients were there for something amazing to happen.

"It was the greatest moment in recorded history, and the planets were aligned just right to make it happen," he said.

Excellent leadership, enthusiasm, competition with the Russians, and continuity in the program were factors that made the program successful.

"Everyone was on board for the Apollo program," Stafford said.

After the resignation of President Nixon, the country started down a road that would undermine its enthusiasm and determination for adventure and exploration, Stafford said.

"The Vietnam war sapped a lot of energy out of the country," he said. "We lost the continuity."

Stafford said President Obama initially spoke of a vigorous space program, but Constellation plans may take a back burner to the many other problems the current administration faces.

"We need a leader who supports it," Stafford said. "You have to have all the elements there. They know how to do it, but they keep getting cutbacks."