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Aerospace industry here on cloud 9

Romano Cedillos

Staff

Tucson Citizen

By ROMANO CEDILLOS

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Cheers erupted yesterday at a local **aerospace** company as President Bush announced his vision to send Americans "headed into the cosmos."

"It went as we anticipated," said Taber MacCallum, chief executive officer of Paragon Space Development Corp. "The president said all the right things."

Paragon designs and produces **aerospace** hardware and life-support systems used in the space shuttles and the International Space Station, as well as by the U.S. military. It stands to gain greatly from Bush's space initiative, which sets a new and invigorated course for America's space program.

"Tucson has a strong connection to the lunar-Mars exploration community," said MacCallum. "The president's plan is going to bring hundreds of millions of dollars to our economy."

Paragon plans to accept the space challenge by increasing its staff of full-time **aerospace** engineers to 12 or more from six by the end of the year.

Most of the excitement at the small company stemmed from Bush's vow to retire the aged fleet of space shuttles after the completion of the International Space Station in 2010. He aims to increase NASA's budget by \$1 billion over the next five years, but curtail its projects and refocus its efforts in order to establish an American colony on the moon. The colony would be used as a launch base for a Mars expedition.

To do this, the proposed Orbital Space Vehicle, now being designed, would have to be reorganized into a deep-space Crew Expedition Vehicle, MacCallum said.

"Paragon hardware will be on those missions to the moon and Mars," he said. "We'll begin with investing in the research needed to improve life-support system technologies for the Crew Exploration Vehicle ... making them lighter weight and lowering the cost."

The company plans to pitch its ideas to NASA, hoping that the space agency will see the benefits of working jointly to design and produce the vehicle's systems, MacCallum said.

Bush's plan is "an incredibly bold move" that will have "a tremendous impact on our economy and all six of Tucson's **industry** clusters," said Sally Garza Fernandez, president of Tucson's **Industry** and **Aerospace** Cluster, which represents the views and concerns of **aerospace** businesses to lawmakers.

The question, Garza Fernandez said, is how quickly the funds will be allocated by Congress.

"Federally funding a program can take two to five years, but hopefully this will be quicker in order to keep it on Bush's fast-track plan," she said.

"Most everyone involved in Tucson's space **industry** is excited about Bush's announcement," said Gary Peterson, technology adviser for Breault Research Organization, a Tucson optics developer.

Although the optics **industry** benefits primarily from unmanned space flights, Peterson said, Breault engineers are contracted to NASA, and the agency uses Breault-designed software in many space programs.

"This is a plus for us," Peterson said.

PHOTO CAPTIONS: XAVIER GALLEGOS/Tucson Citizen

Employees of Paragon Space Development Corp. in Tucson watch President Bush's announcement of an expansion of the space program.

Local tech firms cheer Bush plan 'a plus for us' Story, Page 4 (This photo on 1A)

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