

Thursday, October 12, 1989

NASA tentatively reschedules launch of Atlantis for Tuesday

Technicians begin chore of replacing shuttle's engine computer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA on Wednesday tentatively rescheduled the launch of Atlantis for Tuesday as technicians began the laborious job of replacing the faulty engine computer that scrubbed the flight.

"There is a 50-50 chance of completing the necessary work" in time for a Tuesday launch, a statement said.

It said shuttle managers would meet at noon Saturday to decide whether to aim for that date or to try for Wednesday.

A launch Tuesday, five days later than the original launch date, would

take place during a 24-minute period beginning at 12:57 p.m.

The launch date for Atlantis and five astronauts with a nuclear-powered planetary package will depend on how work progresses in swapping and checking the master control computer in main engine No. 2.

Technicians opened Atlantis' cramped engine compartment Wednesday and set up work platforms so they could gain access to the bad computer.

It is to be removed and a new one installed Friday.

"It's a crowded place to work and it's not easy," said Bob Crippen,

head of a Mission Management Team which set the new launch date. Officials had said earlier that Monday was the earliest possible date.

The delay was announced Tuesday night just 90 minutes after a federal judge rejected a request by three anti-nuclear groups to halt the flight. The groups claimed the shuttle's Jupiter-bound Galileo payload could scatter its radioactive plutonium fuel over Florida if there were an accident during launch.

NASA wants to launch Atlantis and get Galileo on its way as soon as possible because Jupiter will be in the proper position only until Nov. 21; any delay beyond that would put the space probe's flight off until mid-1991.

Atlantis' commander, Donald Williams, said Wednesday he was disappointed the launch was postponed but said he agreed with the decision because "safety is an overriding concern."

He spoke to reporters before he and his four crew members flew back to their training base in Houston to rehearse in a shuttle simulator. They plan to return here two days before the new launch day.

"We understand what happened and why and we concur wholeheartedly and sincerely in the decision," Williams said. "In manned space flight, we obviously take a great deal of effort to make everything fail-safe. We should never, ever deviate from that."

At launch pad 39B, technicians were working on a schedule aimed at completing computer removal, replacement and checkout by late Saturday.

Once the task is completed, NASA could resume the countdown, which was halted at the 19-hour mark. More than 15 hours of hold time is built into the count in case of contin-

gencies, so the countdown time remaining is about 34 hours.

The computer, which weighs 230 pounds and is about the size of a 17-inch portable television, controls all functions on one of the shuttle's three main engines during liftoff.

It became necessary to remove the device, called a master controller, when engineers were unable to determine why it had given a false fuel pump pressure reading.

Shuttle workers received the bad news not long after U.S. District Judge Oliver Gasch ruled in Washington that they could proceed with launch preparations.

"In manned space flight, we obviously take a great deal of effort to make everything fail-safe."

— Donald Williams, Atlantis' commander

"The court concludes that NASA has complied with requirements of the National Environmental Protection Act," Gasch said.

Justice Department attorneys representing the National Aeronautics and Space Administration argued that Galileo's \$1.5 billion, six-year mission to Jupiter carried very low risks.

They said the nuclear generators were well shielded and similar to 38 generators that have flown on 22 previous space missions.

Gasch's ruling came on a request for a temporary restraining order, a ruling that can't be appealed.

The plaintiffs said they were going back to Gasch to seek a preliminary injunction, whose refusal can be appealed.

Subcommittee to focus on offshore oil drilling

WASHINGTON (AP) — A congressional subcommittee will focus on Florida this week as it starts a series of field hearings to review the federal government's policies on offshore oil drilling.

Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., chairman of the House Interior subcommittee on water, power and offshore energy resources, said his hearing Saturday in Key West will focus on a bill that would permanently ban offshore oil drilling in federal waters of South Florida and the Keys.

His subcommittee also will travel to New England, the Pacific Northwest, California and Texas to review the effectiveness of the current offshore drilling law.

"The federal offshore drilling program has become paralyzed by political gridlock," Miller said.

He blasted the Interior Department of the Reagan and Bush administrations for encouraging offshore drilling. He said the policies have alarmed the residents of coastal states.

Congress has responded by passing a series of one-year moratoria on offshore lease sales in specific areas.

At first, the strategy was used just for California leases, but in the fiscal 1990 appropriations bill, specific sites in Florida, New England, the Mid-Atlantic and Alaska also were included.

House loosens abortion fund restrictions

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House agreed Wednesday to allow federally paid abortions for poor women who are victims of rape or incest, reversing nearly a decade of more restrictive votes and inviting a veto from President Bush.

By a 216-206 vote, the House rejected the language it has kept in the law since 1981 and instead endorsed a more liberal provision already passed by the Senate. An effort by conservatives to reverse the vote then failed, 212-207.

Federal aid for abortions, available under Medicaid, is now limited to poor women whose lives have been endangered by a pregnancy.

Wednesday's vote came three months after a Supreme Court ruling giving states greater powers to restrict abortions.

Lawmakers and activists who say women have a right to an abortion said the ruling spurred supporters of their position to make their views known to their legislators. Opponents agreed.

"The political momentum on this issue is so strong now that if President Bush vetoes this, he'd be making a big mistake," said Rep. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., who led the fight for the eased limitations.

Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., who has led the anti-abortion fight in the House for years, said, "I couldn't

characterize it any other way than as a defeat for the unborn. I was surprised, upset and disappointed."

House members without strong positions "felt they had the Supreme Court to protect them" until the July ruling, said Rep. Dale Kildee, D-Mich., and a supporter of tougher restrictions.

Now, however, "it's no longer a vote cast in a vacuum," he said. "It's a vote with real consequences."

The provision agreed to by the

House would allow Medicaid payments for abortions when the mother's life is in jeopardy or when the pregnancy resulted from a rape or incest that was "promptly" reported to authorities. Since 1981 — and as recently as Aug. 2 — the House has voted for language limiting federal aid to abortions only in cases in which the woman's life was in danger.

Just a year ago, the Senate caved in to the restrictive House position

on Medicaid abortion financing by a vote of 47-43.

The abortion provision is part of a \$156.7 billion measure to finance labor, health and education programs for fiscal 1990, which began Oct. 1. The spending bill now moves to the Senate.

Bush threatened in August to veto the bill if it contains the more liberal abortion language. Administration officials reiterated that threat Wednesday.

Florida legislature shoots down attempts by governor to limit rights on abortion

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Gov. Bob Martinez's legislative effort to seek limits on abortions crumbled when a special legislative session adjourned without passing any laws Wednesday, three months after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling gave states a go-ahead for new restrictions.

Florida's House and Senate adjourned Wednesday afternoon, just one day after convening.

"A right, having been established, is not easily removed," House Speaker Tom Gustafson said. "Once the right to choice was established and clearly understood... the right to privacy established and clearly understood, people do not willingly give up those freedoms."

Lawmakers in the House and Senate shot down proposals that would have curbed abortion in many ways.

"I don't think it's a moment for rejoicing," Martinez said. "If anything, it's a moment of sadness."

But national leaders of the pro-choice movement seized the opportunity to call the failed session a sign of a turning tide.

"Florida has just sent a message to the nation," said Eleanor Smeal, president of the Fund for a Feminist Majority and a former president of the National Organization for Women. "Political leaders are getting a public-opinion message that they cannot, should not, restrict or interfere with women's rights any longer."

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