

U.S. Needs Larger Rocket, Aldrin says

BY TODD HALVORSON

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CAPE CANAVERAL-- The nation should develop a heavy lift rocket based on space shuttle components to send astronauts back to the moon and on to Mars, the second man to walk on the moon told a presidential commission Thursday.

During a hearing in Atlanta, held by the President's Commission on Moon, Mars and Beyond, Buzz Aldrin said a super sized rocket would reduce costs as well as the number of missions needed to return to the moon between 2015 and 2020.

"It isn't going to happen unless we have a better way of getting into space," said Aldrin, who set foot on the moon with fellow Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong on July 20, 1969. The two became the first humans to visit another celestial body.

A company headed by Aldrin -- Starcraft Boosters Inc. of Houston -- is designing a heavy lift rocket that would employ shuttle solid rocket boosters and external tanks to loft cargoes weighing up to 115,000 pounds.

That's four times the amount of cargo that could be launched on existing rockets such as the Boeing Delta 4 and Lockheed Martin Atlas 5.

The so called Aquila rocket would fly from Kennedy Space Center's two existing space shuttle pads, and Aldrin suggested a third could be built to support the moon Mars initiative.

And with minor upgrades to the shuttle external tanks, Aldrin said the Aquila could launch a six person crew to a way station near lunar orbit, where the astronauts would board a lander to take to the surface of the moon.

"One launch and we could have the crew there to rendezvous with the lander," he said.

Aldrin told the panel the United States needs enthusiasm similar the "pioneering days" of the first moon landing if it wants to go to Mars.