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Wu tries to land Oregon a retired space shuttle

McMinnville museum - U.S. representative says it will be a tough fight, so he's starting early

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Oregonians could be "orbiting" one of the nation's aging space shuttles in a few years if efforts launched by a congressman and a museum are successful.

U.S. Rep. David Wu, D-Ore., says he made a pitch to NASA administrator Michael Griffin last week for a shuttle to be offered to the Evergreen Aviation Museum in McMinnville after the space workhorses are retired in 2010.

"He told me that 'everyone wants one,' so this is going to be tough," Wu said. "But I wanted to get us a place in line."

Jereme Coker, the museum's executive co-director, said the shuttle would be the centerpiece for a new space building that will be completed by 2008. Visitors could walk around -- orbit -- the shuttle.

"No book has been written on how to acquire a shuttle, so we're beating our own path here," he said.

Wu was at Cape Canaveral, Fla., last week hoping to watch the liftoff of the shuttle Atlantis, but returned Friday to Oregon after officials scrubbed earlier launch efforts. Atlantis launched Saturday.

Three space shuttles are operating -- Atlantis, Discovery and Endeavour -- with a test shuttle, the Enterprise, at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.

Wu speculates that the Smithsonian will receive one of the three operational shuttles, possibly releasing the Enterprise, and NASA probably would take one for the Johnson Space Center in Houston.

The congressman, who helped bring the SR-71A Blackbird spy plane to the McMinnville museum in 2003, said it would probably be a half-dozen years before the aging shuttles are available to museums.

Wu said a shuttle would be "a great education tool," but it will be a "hot competition" to get one. "That's why we're starting early."

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