

**Remarks by the Honorable Sean O’Keefe
NASA Administrator
Apollo 11 Anniversary Event
Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum
July 20, 2004**

Good evening ladies and gentlemen. It is a great privilege to be in this shrine to aviation and spaceflight achievement in the presence of America's first great generation of space explorers, those who made their epic voyages possible, and of our current astronauts and the NASA team members who will enable humanity's next momentous steps in space as Dr. Marburger (Presidential Science Advisory Dr. Jack Marburger) just so eloquently discussed.

There are so many great friends here from Congress who been very, very important in our quest to make this next great step feasible. Senator Bill Nelson, Congressmen Ralph Hall, Nick Lampson, Sheila Jackson Lee, Mike McIntyre, Mike Pence, Vic Snyder, Dave Weldon, Bob Aderholt, Chairman of

the Science Committee Sherry Boehlert, Sam Johnson, Tom Feeney, Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Chairman Dana Rohrabacher and Juliane Sullivan who is here representing Majority Leader Tom DeLay. We are delighted for their participation, their help, their enthusiasm for I think the importance of this evening's event, as well as for our continued quest forward.

I doubt there are any historical parallels to our good fortune here. Certainly, no records exist of people living in Lisbon 500 years ago attending a candlelit tribute to Amerigo Vespucci, Vasco da Gama and Ferdinand Magellan, who was about to set forth on his voyage to circle the globe.

Yet here we are, in the midst of another great age of exploration, thrilled to have under one roof so many heroes who've sailed over the far horizon to the shores of space and back, including to a dusty Sea named Tranquility.

Our Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo astronauts and their even better halves are treasured members of the American and the NASA family.

Throughout one of our nation's most consequential and turbulent decades, the astronauts' daring, courage, and eagerness to explore the unknown never failed to lift our spirits.

Their wives' steadfast devotion never failed to earn our heartfelt admiration. And they did so at times when it was very, very hard.

Because of these pioneers, the Moon, planets and stars are humanity's new field of dreams.

I am truly humbled to be a part of the team that is helping to carry out the legacy of NASA's first generation of space explorers. I am honored to now ask these first heroes of the space age, our Mercury, Gemini and Apollo astronauts here this evening, General Bill Anders, Captain Alan Bean, Captain Eugene Cernan, General Walter Cunningham,

Captain James Lovell, Admiral T.K. Mattingly, the Honorable Harrison Schmitt, General Tom Stafford and Captain John Young and their wives to please stand and receive our appreciation for all that you have done. Thank you.

Now among that our first generation astronauts, I wish to single out the three explorers who 35 years ago today carried out humanity's first exploration of the Moon.

On Apollo 11 Mission Commander Neil Armstrong, Col. Michael Collins and Col. Buzz Aldrin performed with extraordinary grace under pressure while the whole world watched. And we witnessed just a snippet of that just a few moments ago.

As Neil and Buzz explored Tranquility Base's magnificent desolation, while Mike orbited overhead, they reminded us that giant leaps do indeed come from a succession of small steps.

That reminder will guide NASA as we take our next steps in space to extend our exploration horizons ever outward.

To Neil, Mike and Buzz, in grateful appreciation for your achievement that will stand through the ages as one of history's shining moments, and for all that you have subsequently done to help nurture the spirit of Apollo in the next generation of explorers, would you now please rise with your better halves to accept our appreciation as well.

For those of you too young to remember that special day when footprints were first placed on extraterrestrial soil, I don't think anyone can adequately express how exciting and meaningful this epic voyage was to citizens throughout the world.

As a 13-year old back then spending my summer with cousins in New Orleans, I vividly recall watching Neil and Buzz plant the flag at Tranquility

Base while Walter Cronkite zestfully described their activities. I recall thinking that magical night how great it was that we could all take part in this ongoing space adventure. It was really wonderful.

Half way around the world, in Pakistan, where television sets had just been introduced to his village, a boy named Rafat Ansari was also inspired by the ghostly images of the two moonwalkers that evening.

Rafat grew up to become a NASA scientist. He's invented a unique device that will help our astronauts detect cataracts, a device that will also be useful to people here on Earth. Who knows what innovation will be inspired by another youngster watching explorers like Eileen Collins in the next decade?

Thirty-five years ago as a 12-year old growing up in Elmira, New York, Eileen also avidly followed the moonwalkers, proud that our country could do something as amazing as send explorers to the Moon.

Today of course, Air Force Col. Eileen Collins, a veteran of three space flights and the first woman to command a Shuttle mission, is training hard with her STS-114 crewmates for our next important step in space, NASA's return to Shuttle flight operations.

The entire STS-114 crew has graciously taken time off from their training schedule to be with us tonight. Please welcome Commander Collins and her crewmembers, Pilot James Kelly, and Mission Specialists Soichi Noguchi, Steve Robinson, Andy Thomas, Wendy Lawrence and Charles Camarda.

There's one other group of astronauts I'd like to recognize. Two months ago at the Smithsonian's magnificent new Udvar-Hazy Air and Space Museum, we introduced our newest generation of astronauts. These are the folks, who along with veteran astronaut Carlos Noriega, Lee Morin and John Grunsfeld, who are also here tonight, will blaze

new trails of exploration and discovery through the Solar System. Randy Bresnik, Robert Kimbrough and James Dutton members of our astronaut class of 2004 here with us this evening, you are that next generation of our Constellation astronauts. Please rise.

No doubt many of our new class of astronauts will also have the opportunity to work on that remarkable research facility currently orbiting at 250 miles over our heads known as the International Space Station. And tomorrow night at about 10:40 you can get a brief glimpse of the Space Station as it traces a stately arc across the northeast corner of the sky just above the horizon here in Washington.

Currently, our Expedition Nine crewmembers, Cosmonaut Commander Gennady Padalka and U.S. Science Officer Mike Fincke are working hard on Space Station research that will help pave the way for future missions beyond low earth orbit. Through the

wonders of modern communications, they are going to join us this evening as well.

Astronaut Mike Fincke

Greetings from the International Space Station. I am Expedition Nine Flight Engineer Mike Fincke, along with my Commander Gennady Padalka. It is an honor to be in orbit as we commemorate the 35th anniversary of Apollo 11 an incredible achievement in the history of human exploration. More than four decades ago with just 15 minutes of spaceflight experience under our belts, President Kennedy outlined a bold vision to land a man on the moon and return him safely to the Earth. A simple statement. At that time a goal that seemed impossible to achieve. Yet, less than nine years later Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin, with Michael Collins orbiting overhead, became the first humans to venture onto an alien world. Today the President has given us a new vision for space

exploration that will extend the reach of humanity beyond Earth Orbit back to the Moon, and eventually on to Mars and beyond. And we're going to approach these important exploration objectives with the same ingenuity, commitment and unwavering determination that forged the Apollo program.

Humans and machines working together to pioneer a future of exploration and discovery. As you know, my daughter was born just about a month ago and it thrills me to think of her growing up in a world when we represent nations living and working together in space for the peaceful exploration for the benefit of everyone on Earth. So as we pause to look back and honor the accomplishments of the Apollo Program 35 years ago, we should also remember to keep an eye on the future, and the importance of taking that next giant leap for mankind.

Sean O'Keefe

Six months ago, as Mike just said, President Bush came to NASA headquarters to tell the country and the world that NASA would make good on Apollo 17 astronaut Eugene Cernan's pledge that we would return to the moon, "with peace and hope for all mankind," and of course do much, much more in the pursuit of our exploration and discovery agenda. So please enjoy this video that highlights the President's vision for space exploration and the steps we will take to implement it and the efforts we are diligently carrying out in order to inherent that Apollo legacy with distinction.

(Video Presentation)

That's our ambition. That's what we hope the inspiration of this generation of great space explorers will help us achieve. This tribute to our space exploration heroes demonstrates is that our Agency is quite proud of our past, but in even larger measure, excited about the opportunities of the future. And we

are delighted to be supported by what I now understand to be seven out of 10 Americans who believe we should pursue this space exploration initiative.

The attitude of being hopeful and optimistic about the future is one the astronauts have always held. As justifiably proud as they are of their individual achievements, after each mission our astronauts always looked forward to a new mission, a new challenge around the bend. And for those that are currently on the inactive list of the astronaut corps--I've learned that there's no such thing as a retired astronaut; guys like Bill Readdy and Fred Gregory remind me of that every day, to no avail!--that mission has often been to tell their amazing stories to young people so that they in turn will be inspired to carry the torch of exploration to heights unimagined and into frontiers unknown.

I've had occasion in the past to call the astronauts our "ambassadors of good will to the universe."

Tonight we are going to give them a slightly different title: Ambassadors of Exploration.

To recognize their continued service to the cause of exploration, NASA is honored to present to each of our Mercury, Gemini and Apollo astronauts and surviving better halves, as well as America's long-time honorary astronaut, Walter Cronkite, a sample from the 842 pounds of Moon rocks and soil returned during the six lunar expeditions between 1969 and 1972.

Our Ambassadors of Exploration in turn will present these samples on loan from NASA to a museum or school of their choice, where they will be prominently displayed in order to inspire dreams of space travel in a new generation of explorers.

I would like to invite future space explorer Arteisha Hughes a high school senior here in

Washington, D.C. and the daughter of NASA employees Kelly Robinson and Fred Brown to come forward and present our first lunar sample to the Apollo 11 crew members, our heroes for this time and for all times.

(Lunar sample presentation to Apollo 11 crew)

Finally as Ambassadors of Exploration, we hope all our recipients will continue with their good and often unpublicized works to convey to audiences why our continued space exploration activities boost the opportunities we will have to become a smarter, safer, healthier and more intelligent world on a scale never seen before in the history of the planet, at a pace hardly thought possible.

Again, I thank everyone for the opportunity to be a part of this special event and I congratulate these tremendous heroes of our time.