

**Remarks by the Honorable Sean O’Keefe
NASA Administrator
Remarks Upon Leaving NASA
NASA Headquarters
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Thank you. Thank you so much. And good morning. And thank you all for making time to be here today.

Not a single day goes by during the time I've been the Administrator that I don't think how lucky I've been to be surrounded by friends and colleagues and yes indeed, belying my naval service past and lineage, to be among shipmates of the highest quality.

Today is a day for me that is mixed with deep emotions and challenging ones as well. As you've heard I suspect by countless reports, I will indeed be departing as the NASA Administrator, after three years of work that I have deeply enjoyed.

Last night the Louisiana State University Board of Supervisors voted to extend to me the privilege to be the seventh Chancellor of Louisiana State University. I have accepted that opportunity.

I intend to depart after the President names my successor in the hopes that the Senate will confirm his nominee by February.

I will continue to follow the exploits of this fine organization in the years to come with great pride and a full heart and the knowledge that I will still forever be a member of the extended NASA family.

I hope this morning you will indulge me a bit to take just a moment or two to describe for you how much working with you has meant to me these past three years.

There's a poem by Rudyard Kipling that I've reflected upon at times during my tenure here. It's somewhat enigmatically titled "If." One stanza in it

is particularly apt to my time here and indeed the ethos of this organization:

"If you can dream - and not make dreams
your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts
your aim;
If you can meet with triumph and disaster
And treat those two imposters just the
same."

What Kipling tells us about life is simple. We will see moments of great joy and times of great despair whatever it is that we do. Our greatest challenge of course is to keep on a steady course through such times, recognizing that life runs in cycles, and that we must dream and think and record concrete achievements as well.

Another way to think about this, I think in a nautical paraphrase of Oliver Wendell Holmes is, "At times you sail with the wind, at other times against it.

But you must never allow yourself to simply drift or lie at anchor afraid to put to sea."

It seems to me that such an approach is particularly important here at NASA. And we've lived it by the very nature of what we do. And indeed there have been times of extraordinary triumph and moments of great tragedy as well. I've certainly seen both during my time here. And my sense is that we've sailed steadily through both such times and along the way seeking to transform for a new century. Along the way tragedy, triumph and transformation. I've seen them all in my time and my tenure here. And I'd like to speak for a moment about each.

In times of great tragedy I've been inspired by the actions of all of you as colleagues throughout this great agency that most, I think fittingly were captured by the commentary offered by President John F. Kennedy, expressing the view that "all great and

honorable actions are accompanied with great difficulties, and both must be enterprised and overcome with answerable courage."

Tragedy has been part of my time here at NASA along with all of you, as it has I suspect for all in the extended NASA Family as well. Just as many over the years can remember the moments when the costs of space exploration were suddenly and tragically evident, sometimes paid for in the lives of brilliant Americans. I will never forget the moment that I was informed the Columbia was gone. On the skid strip at the Kennedy Space Center on that morning--a brilliant blue morning--a Saturday in February nearly two years ago. I know for everyone listening today, it was a moment of deep sadness realizing that such wonderful friends were gone, their lives ended in a moment.

The speed in which our emotions shifted from great triumph with the return of a remarkable mission

that had achieved so much, to within moments a recognition and a realization of great tragedy.

Tragedy is but one side of the equation of course. And for each moment of tragedy there also comes many moments of real triumph in working with an organization as important as NASA. Indeed both ends of that dimension and all in between define who we are. There have been indeed great moments, wonderful high moments, in my journey here that we've all shared together these last three years.

Rover landings...when I watched the Rovers land on and begin the exploration of the red planet, I knew we had completed an important chapter in space travel and science and defied the odds. Clearly we have far to go on Mars, but the information, the imagery and the data provided by the Rovers will serve us well in the time ahead and inform each of those exploration missions in turn.

We will continue to search for life on this neighboring planet, and indeed as our charge is, throughout the solar system. What we learn here will stand us in good stead as we explore the greater Universe in the decades to come.

The Rovers are but one example of our approach to space exploration. We have built an exploration strategy based on long-term affordability and I'm proud to say we have delivered on what we have promised, year after year to the people of the United States as public servants of those that we serve.

We deliver tangible benefits to the Nation from medical advances in human physiology to better ceramics and weather prediction, that full range of activities that we engage in. The future is bright, and indeed, those 17 billion visitors to our web site over the course of these last eleven and a half months are but one indicator of how interested and supportive the American people are of space exploration.

Indeed, they live through us vicariously. We have again the most remarkable charter, of people who are privileged to be public servants, to explore and discover on their behalf. Who could imagine a more exciting portfolio to pursue?

Indeed there have been great triumphs beyond the Rovers. Nothing in my time here at NASA makes me I think more proud than the effort that we engaged in to develop and begin implementation of the President's Vision for Space Exploration. And in it the President laid out fundamental goals of great seriousness and importance for our Nation. It defines us as Americans, as explorers, as those who seek to materially improve the human condition, our knowledge and understanding of who we are and how this originated by this quest to explore, understand and discover.

But along the way this is a very specific strategy and one that has very specific milestones to it. It's

not a random collection of great ideas, it is a very specific strategy that will take us in the time in the years and indeed decades ahead, if we're diligent in this very immediate period of achieving that goal.

The very first, the very critical step in that path, the first major step in that effort is to return the Space Shuttles to flight. And indeed I find this to be an important opening chapter of my successor, in that first stage of moving towards accomplishment of the Vision for Space Exploration, rather than being a concluding chapter of my tenure.

Far better that the foundation and the work done to achieve that goal has been positioned now to provide that opportunity in the very short time ahead to accomplish that first great step, with great diligence, great care and indeed under the watchful eye of the American public we serve, to measure our capacity to achieve all the balance of this broader exploration agenda that the President has laid out for

us. So it is fitting that it be the opening chapter, the first chapter, for whoever will succeed.

Second is assembling the Space Station by the end of the decade, moving beyond to understand that challenge of long-duration spaceflight, of expeditionary, exploration focus. A complete shift we've made in the course of the last year to thinking in that direction, that will then inform the next step which is a return to the Moon, not for a limited duration, but for an extended duration to understand how to continue that quest and that journey.

We're learning so much today about what we'll learn and employ tomorrow for those broader exploration objects. And the challenges, and indeed travails that we experience right now at this moment of maintaining that capacity on International Space Station is what will inform that expeditionary view and motivate us to think in entirely different ways about how to accomplish these exploration goals and

to make this truly a journey, not a race as the President observed. And from that the eventual exploration of Mars and beyond throughout the Solar System. The sustainment of affordable human and robotic programs to explore the Solar System and beyond, development of innovative technologies for exploration, international and commercial participation that we see building in its enthusiasm every day...to reflect on it for a moment, just a year or so folks didn't believe possible.

Add to these triumphs, the success of the Cassini mission to Saturn. Breaking the speed record of powered flight not once but twice in the course of this past year. Seven successful expedition missions to the International Space Station. And multiple additions to our constellation of Earth Observing systems to monitor our fragile planet and how we are treating it. All these are accomplishments we're

doing today that have advantage tomorrow in the days, weeks, months, years and decades to follow.

The President has given us to be sure a daunting and challenging agenda. No doubt. But I firmly believe in the talents and dedication of everyone in the NASA family. These are very realistic goals that we will continue to achieve. And indeed triumphs that are still to come. We should all be inspired by the very nature of why we do this, best captured by the President's view that "this cause of exploration and discovery is not an option we choose. It is indeed a desire written in the human heart."

Our task here at NASA is to fulfill the desires of the heart, and indeed of the nation, in searching beyond planets and stars. And God willing there will be many, many more triumphs to come for this great organization.

Let me turn to a word about transformation in this trilogy of triumph, tragedy and transformation.

And it is a story that all of us have been so deeply involved in this organization. Taking the significant extraordinary capability we have throughout all of NASA and restructuring it for the 21st century has been a central challenge of our time together. It is indeed a challenge that many observed just a year ago couldn't to be achieved. Yet it has begun, begun in earnest, and we look back and wonder how it was ever any other way.

Our new Exploration Systems Mission Directorate will initially be responsible for developing the solar system vehicles and technologies described in the President's plan to be sure. They will work closely with the Space Science Mission Directorate, to inform those science objectives, those missions, those exploration goals. To, for example, use the Moon as a testing ground for solar system exploration vehicles, and technologies.

These activities will put much greater emphasis on the understanding of our capacity for human exploration to other worlds as well as robotic precursor missions but meanwhile be responsible for coordinating and integrating the exploration activities of all the different activities of the Agency through the Aerospace and Aeronautics research and Space Operations Mission focus.

This is a radically new approach to doing business here but in many ways a reach back to that which made us great in the very beginnings of our history as an Agency. And I'm confident that this structure will indeed transform or approach the mindset, the focus we take to this each and every day to prepare our organization best for the challenges that lay ahead. And all of us in every Mission Directorate, and Mission Support Directorates, in the ten Centers that make up the fabric of what is this tremendous organization we know as NASA, will be

driven by a fundamental focus that it is about the mission, and it's about us, and it's about each one of us individually. Mission, us and me in that order. It is about the mission that we're asked to achieve. Because it is about us and taking care of each other in that task of meeting that goal. And assuring that each of us are given the opportunity to contribute to it to the best of our abilities.

There will indeed be triumph and likely tragedy ahead if history is any guide. But I'm certain that NASA will approach our future well prepared and ready for whatever comes focused by the objective. It is about the mission, it is about us and it is about each one of us individually. What we can do to accomplish that task.

The future is as bright as the sun and is as expansive as the Universe itself. And in many ways I would love to continue my work with all of you. But each of us as public servants are well aware of all the

demands and concerns of public service takes a toll on the immediate family. My oldest daughter, Lindsey, is heading off to college next year and my two sons, Kevin and Jonathan, follow not far behind. And these are the same three kids that I talked about when I first arrived here. In slightly different terms because of course they were three years younger then.

My oldest daughter was aspiring to a drivers' license. She's attained that goal as a consequence to the wisdom she demonstrated on the day that I told her that the President had appointed me as the NASA Administrator. She said nothing. Looked at me incredulously and kept her counsel. Showing great wisdom well beyond her years. And as a consequence earned that drivers' license. She won it. She's a very proficient driver and doing exceptionally well in school. She's qualified to go to some tremendous schools and colleges that I would have

never have dreamed of having the opportunity to go to. Indeed her safety schools were well beyond my reach.

Now regrettably the other two were not quite as well informed of fortuity three years ago when I informed them of the President's decision of what he had in mind for me. My son Jonathan, upon learning this as well unlike Lindsey was not constrained in his commentary and he either spoke before he thought or thought seriously about what he really believed and said exactly what was on his mind, which was, "This is really terrific Dad, but I thought you had to be smart to be in that job." And this is a kid who's 15 now. He's aspiring to a drivers' license, and owing to a long Irish memory, as far as I'm concerned he'll never drive. (Laughter)

Kevin can be forgiven...I guess. He had just filled with the spirit of the same attitude that his brother Jonathan had at the time. And again certainly

a couple of years younger. Maybe I got to look the other way on it, but now being 13. His view was, "Yea dad, you're no rocket scientist."

And indeed as one of our former colleagues once observed, "All these observations can be true at the same time." And they are.

But now is a time to continue public service and an opportunity to continue public service in a University environment that I'm very much looking forward to being part of, and I would have never dreamed I would have the opportunity to lead as a Chancellor. And indeed, I think to think a little bit more deeply about their requirements at home as well.

They have supported me, Laura and our three kids, throughout my addiction to public service. And now I have an opportunity to give them a bit closer support, in a capacity that while challenging provides an environment for their support. It should be a lot of

fun...environment for their support. And nothing other than the needs of my family would induce me to depart NASA or to depart public service, and service to this President, and service to the Public and service as a member of this team of a tremendous Administration.

I will continue to closely follow your work, and support your every goal and endeavor, indeed cheering from the sidelines as you move forward to success after success. And along the way again knowing that I will still be an extended member of the NASA family.

I am eternally grateful to the President and to Vice President Cheney for the privilege they have offered me to serve in this great Agency, to serve with all of you. I am so grateful to my first mentor in public service in Washington, Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska, a gentleman I have learned a great from in understanding how the process of this city works.

And again employing it to great gains that he taught me from the very beginning that it must always be to the benefit of those we serve, the public. And to the President's dad, fondly known as 41, President Bush, for his great confidence in me in previous capacities, and an opportunity to have learned more about the challenges as well as opportunities of public service that I have tried to employ to its fullest extent in this capacity these last three years. And I thank each of them, and above all I thank each of you.

These are opportunities that I think that on an occasion like this, have been accompanied not only by great professionalism, but also by great friendship by all those involved.

In addition to the trilogy that I described of my three children's reaction when I first came here three years ago, I also talked about a different trilogy, one that Paul O'Neill first instilled in me, as a description of the elements and components of what makes up a

great organization. You may recall that we talked about and described at that time, was great organizations are defined as those that first and foremost, every person within that organization has a deep respect for each other's capacity, capabilities and professionalism and honors that respect by treating each other in the same manner in which we would like to be treated ourselves.

The second is that organization provides the resources necessary in order to achieve the goals that are set out for the task and assesses those in a rather challenging manner, because you never ever will achieve every element of resource you need or want or desire in order to achieve the task. But at least understands what those priorities are and assigns them accordingly and puts the resources where the priorities state that indeed the focus of the Agency or the group of organizations or people should be.

And then finally, the third element of what constitutes a great organization is that people notice. They notice when it goes very successful, and honor that success accordingly, and notice when it doesn't quite go quite so successfully, and observes the consequences thereof.

In these three years we have attained the status in my judgment of a truly great organization. Much work needs to be done I think in order to really fulfill all of those objectives, but it's on exactly the right path. There is a discernable, palpable recognition of respect between and among us that didn't exist to the same extent that I see today than when I first arrived here three years ago. What I see now are people who value each other's view and continue to find ways to capitalize on that knowledge and leverage it for the greatest gain and respect each other's position to yield the greatest professional advantage.

And for those among us who don't see that in evidence, there is a sense now of responsibility that we should work harder to see it attained by each and every one of us.

We also have today a markedly different resource base. Empirically it is several billion dollars above what it was three years ago and focused towards a very specific set of objectives that has a priority that begins with one and descends and it has a specific set of objectives that needs to be accomplished.

While we may debate regularly how those elements should be achieved in turn, as a consequence of other factors, the resources are dedicated specifically to the task of achieving those goals, and none less than the highest level of this government has put the credibility as well as motivation behind the accomplishment and achievement of those resources to carry out the goals

directed. And it will be a continuing process, but one that is very patterned in that direction.

And the third is the reward of someone noticing. People notice a lot what we do. People don't come to this web site as often as they do because they're just curious. And it's not just Glenn Mahone hitting his computer 17 billion times. We see it and feel it every single day in what we do....the excitement that people express when they learn that you work for NASA.

Let me encourage you to look for a constant infusion of why this is important by visiting any Explorer School that we sponsor today, and seeing the absolute transformative effort that has occurred there as a consequence of just our interest in motivating a focus to math and science education, and bringing it to life by the exotic and exciting things we do. It suddenly has meaning, and motivates a whole new generation of people to want

to do what we do. People notice, and they notice in far greater numbers and in far greater intensity and with a much deeper sense of emotion than they did three years ago. And that's not by accident. It's a consequence of us focusing on being a truly great organization and manifesting all of the values that come with that.

Let me conclude with a couple of thoughts that again express somewhat the mixed emotion that I have for this. Because again, this is an opportunity I look forward to. And in the coming weeks, in the concluding time of my tenure here, please know, that like each of you, I will spend every one of those days putting my absolute complete best into every one of the tasks that I take on till the very moment I leave this great Agency.

But as a consequence of again, my heritage as Irish in my birth and my inclination, let me quote from an ancient Irish song of the open road. And it's

a bit fatalist. But again, that describes the Irish as well.

"We always knew it would be so. That you would stay and I should go.

The sun will set and rise anew, and I wish to tell you in all that you do that you do well."

It has been the greatest privilege to sail with all of you in the time that I've had. The President reminds us with great regularity that we have an opportunity to serve, some of us for a season, or for a term, or for a career. But in doing so we all have a responsibility to do our best. And that I've tried to do.

When Columbus made his voyages across the Atlantic in the 15th and 16th centuries his ships carried the inscription, "Following the light of the sun, we left the old world." In our time together we sailed towards the light of the sun and left the old world behind. And as I move on to other challenges, I wish

all here of the NASA Family the very best of voyages to come. We will indeed reach the light of the sun, and sail far beyond as well. And along the way continue to be inspired by an ethic, an ethos, a culture that has never wavered in this organization in its great 46 years of existence that manifests in its very best form in an emotion, and indeed a charge that Teddy Roosevelt observed. It is evident in many of the poster art that we see around this Agency, and indeed right outside my office. I see it every day. And that is, "It is far better to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs even though checkered by failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much because they live in the great twilight that knows neither victory nor defeat."

I thank you for everything that you do each and every day. It was a great privilege to be serving with you. God bless each and every one of you in this fine

organization as you continue to reach beyond the planets, the stars and sail into the new worlds of the 21st century. Thank you all very much. (Applause)