Remarks As Prepared For Delivery
By the Honorable Shana Dale
NASA Deputy Administrator
A-3 Test Stand Groundbreaking
August 23, 2007

Thank you Rick (Richard Gilbrech, Director, John C. Stennis Space Center) for that introduction.

I appreciate the vision and leadership that you and Doc Horowitz have shown. We would not be here today without it. It is particularly appropriate to have Rick and Doc together with me today because, as you know, Doc will be handing the Exploration Systems Mission Directorate reins to Rick in the near future.

Doc has done incredible work getting our Nation's new effort of exploration off the ground and I appreciate all that he has done. Rick Gilbrech will be outstanding as the head of ESMD (Exploration Systems Mission Directorate), although I am sure he will be greatly missed here at Stennis.

Mike Griffin and I appreciate you both, Rick and Doc. We also appreciate the all of you here at Stennis and in the Exploration Systems Mission Directorate for the outstanding work you are doing. You've dedicated yourselves to this new effort under the most difficult of circumstances, that of rebuilding your homes and your communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. I know many of you are still working to do so. And Mike and cannot thank you enough for your determination and commitment.

I also would like to thank the following statesmen from Mississippi for joining us:

- Governor Haley Barbour,
- Senator Trent Lott,
- Senator Thad Cochran and
- Congressman Gene Taylor

Their support of the Stennis Space Center, and their commitment to America's leadership in space is invaluable.

Groundbreakings are about new beginnings. That's true today. The A-3 Test Stand is the first large stand to be built on this site since Stennis itself was established more than 40 years ago.

The first stand was erected to test the Saturn V rocket of the Apollo program. Testing of the Space Shuttle engines began here in the mid 1970's. And today, we're breaking ground for a new test stand, for the new spacecraft of a new era of exploration.

The A-3 stand that will be constructed here will test the J-2X engine. That is the engine that will take America back to the Moon, and then beyond.

As all of you know, we've been given the charge and challenge of opening a way of exploration to the Moon, Mars and beyond. And unlike an earlier era, we're going back to the Moon to stay.

This sounds like a dream – and it started that way – but it is now becoming a reality.

Work has begun on the spacecraft that will take us on the next steps outward: The Ares I rocket, which will lift the Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle into orbit, and the Ares V rocket, which will serve as the heavy lift vehicle; propelling the crew of the Orion and the equipment they need beyond low earth orbit.

The J-2X engine is a key component of both rockets. We won't make it to the Moon without it. That's why NASA recently signed a $1.2 billion contract for the design, development, testing and evaluation of the engine. We hope to be testing the J-2X here – at the newly completed test stand – before the end of the first decade of this century.

While this stand is being constructed, other components for the new spacecraft will be coming together. In fact, by the end of this calendar year, all major contracts for the Ares 1 launch vehicle and the Orion Crew Exploration Vehicle will have been awarded.

The engines will be assembled here at Stennis, and then subjected to rigorous, expert testing. After that, those engines and the rockets they will power will travel to Cape Canaveral. And then the finished spacecraft will lift off, headed for a new destination and a new era of exploration.

Let me leave you with a final thought. Forty-one years ago today, a small silvery craft was circling the Moon, on a mission dedicated to scientific discovery and human exploration. Lunar Orbiter 1 (the first of what would prove to be five missions), took a photograph, the first of its kind.

Orbiter 1 sent back the first image of the Earth as seen from the Moon. That new view – the small crescent of Earth hanging above the stark, sunlit surface of the Moon – signaled a fundamental shift in perspective. Our planet was seen as a small, small place, yet filled with people bold enough to reach new worlds. The Apollo landings followed a few years later. And we've never looked at our world, or our potential, in the same way since.

Today, the high frontier is opening again: A new mission, a new challenge, and a new era of exploration. You who live in Mississippi and who work at this space center will see that frontier opening. You'll hear it too: The rumble of Moon-bound rockets being tested here; the thunder of possibility; the roar of freedom.

That's the future at this new test stand; that's the future at the Stennis Space Center; that's the future of America.

We’re at the beginning of a bold new journey: A toehold, a small step, a giant leap. On the far horizon we can see a day of living and working on another world; of a blue planet seen from the grey soil or red sands of a distant new outpost.

That’s our hope. It could be our future. Let’s make it happen together.

Thank you.