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NASA News Conference on
ASTRONAUT HEALTH REVIEW

Speakers:

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Moderated by David Mould,
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MODERATOR: Good afternoon from NASA Headquarters in Washington, and welcome to an update on the agency's response to the Astronaut Health Care System Review Committee report issued last month, including findings from a special Space Flight Safety Review resulting from that report.

I am David Mould from NASA Public Affairs, and with us today are the Administrator of NASA, Dr. Michael Griffin, and NASA's Chief of Safety and Mission Assurance, Bryan O'Connor.

We will begin with opening statements, first from the Administrator, and then we will go to your questions.

And now the Administrator of NASA, Mike Griffin.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Thank you, David.

Good afternoon, and thanks to all of you for joining us.

For a number of weeks now, senior managers at NASA, directed by myself and Deputy Administrator Shana Dale, have been evaluating a report from a team of outside experts who were asked to review our agency's medical and behavioral health care policies and practices for

astronauts.

In response to the report, we are moving forward on a number of actions and modifications of NASA policies, procedures, and organizational structures that we believe can improve our astronaut health care system.

The committee chaired by Colonel Richard Bachmann, Commander of the U.S. Air Force School of Aerospace Medicine, put in great time, thought, and effort into their report, and we are grateful for their service and for their interest in helping us to make NASA a better agency.

I would now like to update you on our progress in several areas. The first area which has certainly received the most attention is the allegations in the report of improper use of alcohol by astronauts preparing to fly. As I think you know, we asked NASA Chief of Safety and Mission Assurance, Colonel Bryan O'Connor, to conduct an extensive examination into claims of astronauts being impaired by alcohol in the immediate preflight period, as well as claims of management not being responsive to concerns by flight surgeons and others about astronauts' fitness to fly.

Bryan immediately set to work on this task, poring through records of Shuttle, Soyuz, and other flights involving U.S. astronauts for the past 20 years. He interviewed astronauts, flight controllers, medical personnel, and scores of other people who take part in training and evaluating our crews and getting them ready to fly.

His review found no evidence to support the claims that astronauts were ever impaired by alcohol at launch time. In fact, NASA's flight surgeons have come forward to put their names on a communication to us saying that they had no evidence of alcohol impairment by astronauts on flight day nor any instances of concerns to management being disregarded. That communication is part of Bryan's report.

I have said many times over the past few weeks that we take these allegations very seriously because if true they are very serious, just as we would any issue that could impact the safety of our astronauts and our missions, but at the same time, I have also said that the stories cited in the report seem improbable to those of us who are familiar with the rigorous and very public activities on

the timeline leading up to a space flight.

Bryan is with me here today to discuss this review and to help answer your questions. I want to thank him publicly for taking on this task and completing it in such an expeditious manner, but before he tells you about this review and its results, I want to briefly mention some of the other things we are doing to address the other concerns and recommendations of the report by Colonel Bachmann and his committee, which we believe are very valuable in helping us to improve our health care procedures.

Specifically, in response to the report, NASA's medical managers are working to determine how many of the changes and initiatives advocated by the committee would fit into our health care procedures in a way that improves their effectiveness. We have accepted the report's recommendations concerning the analysis and use of behavioral health data to improve selection criteria, and we will convene an expert working group to advise us on any changes to our psychological testing.

We are evaluating the overall delivery of behavioral health care services to astronauts and are

planning additional training for flight surgeons in behavioral health assessments. We will add behavioral health evaluations to annual flight physicals for all astronauts, and we will work to ensure better communication throughout the astronaut health care system.

We are working to ensure that astronauts fully understand the nature and purpose of all health-related testing and data collection. We are working to make sure that everyone in the astronaut health care system understands the multiple pathways which are available to them to raise any safety and health concerns.

We are reevaluating our electronic medical records system to assure maximum utility and security of private medical information.

We are examining our policies for assuring the quality of care that we arrange for our astronauts by outside medical providers to determine if changes are needed there.

The Astronaut Office is developing a formal code of conduct to document the expectations for this highly skilled group of professionals. America's astronauts have always operated within the knowledge that much is expected

of them in many areas, including personal conduct, but until now, these expectations and standards have not been codified into an official document, and this will be their codification of those standards.

To address organizational culture issues discussed in the report, we are conducting a number of internal assessments, including anonymous surveys that could be completed by astronauts and flight surgeons and to provide feedback and further information that we will use to improve communications and ensure that leadership is responsive to concerns and complaints, particularly those involving flight safety.

So, once again, I would like to thank Colonel Bachmann and the members of his committee for their efforts. I would like to reassure members of the committee that while much media attention has been given to the allegations relating to alcohol abuse, I and other managers are giving the entire report the full and complete attention that it deserves. We appreciate their interest in helping us to make NASA a better agency.

Now I would like to turn the proceedings over to our Chief of the Office of Safety and Mission Assurance,

Colonel Bryan O'Connor.

COLONEL O'CONNOR: Thank you, Mike.

In its final report dated 27 July 2007, the Astronaut Health Care System Review Committee found the following: "Interviews with flight surgeons and astronauts identified episodes of heavy use of alcohol by astronauts in the immediate preflight period which led to flight safety concerns. Two specific instances were described where astronauts had been so intoxicated prior to flight that flight surgeons and/or fellow astronauts raised concerns to local on-scene leadership regarding flight safety. However, the individuals were still permitted to fly."

In response, the Deputy Administrator appointed me to review these reported allegations. The purpose of this review was twofold: first, evaluate the committee's finding related to the inappropriate use of alcohol by astronauts in the immediate preflight or space flight period; and two, evaluate relevant existing policies at NASA covering alcohol use and abuse.

My approach to this review was to learn as much as I could about the reported allegations through

interviews, data searches, and history review. The goal here was to establish the nature and the scope of any flight crew alcohol abuse; thus, enabling a more informed course of action in our policies, procedures, risk mitigation strategies, authority structure, and communications.

The scope of the review was limited to space flight with a focus on the activities of launch day from the time of crew wake-up until launch. For this potential flight safety issue, the relevant question for me was did we have an instance where a crewmember presented on launch morning in an impaired state, was then observed as such by the flight surgeon or another crewmember, and then over their objections was cleared to fly by operational management.

Consistent with our standard approach to anonymous safety concerns, my investigative method included a search of over 1,500 anonymous reporting system reports going back to 1987 when we began using our NASA Safety Reporting System, and also with the help of the NASA Safety Center, we searched literally tens of thousands of mishap and close-call records going back that same length of time.

I received inputs by phone, e-mail, and in person from over 90 individuals who have been involved in activities during the last few days before launch at the Kennedy Space Center or Kazakhstan. I heard from every one of our current operational flight surgeons and more than 80 percent of the current astronaut corps, which as you know is dispersed, some people on vacation, and people training all over the world.

I also talked to suit technicians, medical staff, operational managers, crew quarters managers, food service staff, closeout crew technicians, and as you know, those are the last people that see the astronauts before they get into the vehicle.

Then to supplement this review, I reminded members of our flight community that they should feel free to use any hotlines or NASA Safety Reporting System for any flight safety information that they felt reluctant to bring to me in an open forum. Also, NASA is preparing a focused anonymous survey to follow up this review, and this survey will help to try to flesh out any residual concerns in this or any of the other areas covered by the committee report.

Within the scope and the limitations of this

review, I was not able to verify any case where an astronaut space flight crewmember was impaired on launch day or any case where any NASA manager disregarded recommendations by either a flight surgeon or another crewmember that an astronaut crewmember not be allowed to fly on the Shuttle or the Soyuz.

Should such a situation present itself in the future, my review makes me confident that there are reasonable safeguards in place to prevent an impaired crewmember from ever boarding a spacecraft.

As for disregard for flight surgeon or crew safety concerns, I found that although there may be occasional disagreements among operations and medical team and engineers and others in our team, all parties understand their roles and their authorities and the multiple safety reporting and appeal paths that we have in place.

This report makes one recommendation to improve flight surgeon oversight during the launch day activities.

Also, I found several areas in the various NASA and other relevant policies that should be improved for scope and clarity, and this report has specific recommendations in

the policy area.

Now, this review is complete, but I have reminded the entire workforce on this matter that alcohol abuse or any other flight safety threat should be reported in an open forum when it is seen or, if necessary, through any one of our several anonymous reporting systems in place at NASA.

I will be glad to take any questions you might have on this.

MODERATOR: We are going to have questions from here at Headquarters and also from the Johnson Space Center. We will start here at Headquarters.

Please wait for the microphone, and identify yourself and your affiliation, please. Let's start with Seth.

QUESTIONER: Seth Borenstein, Associated Press. One for each of your gentlemen.

For Colonel O'Connor, if you found no problems, why raise the issue of drug and alcohol testing for NASA employees, not just astronauts, if it isn't a problem, and for Administrator Griffin, Bryan raised this issue. It is up to you to -- he said it should be explored. How do you

feel about the idea of drug and alcohol testing of NASA employees?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, actually, we are required to do drug and alcohol testing, going back to the Civil Space Employee Testing Act of 1991, which directs the Administrator to establish such a program. So we, of course, as an agency have to draft an appropriate set of regulations to implement that, and I have recently found out that that has never been done. So we actually have to do that, anyway.

Going beyond that general comment to the specifics of your question, I think if there are concerns about the integrity of our processes, then if we have such testing, we will be able to allay those concerns. So I would view such testing as a vindication rather than as an indictment.

MODERATOR: Tracy?

QUESTIONER: Tracy Watson, USAToday for Bryan O'Connor.

In your report, you elaborate a little bit on the Soyuz incident saying that apparently an astronaut about to fly on Soyuz was so drunk that the flight surgeon felt

compelled to stay in his bedroom to make sure he was okay overnight.

I am wondering if that didn't pose a safety-of-flight risk, is that a concern to you still, and were you unable to narrow down exactly when that happened, how close to the flight?

Thanks.

COLONEL O'CONNOR: Tracy, I looked into that within the constraints of medical privacy where we can't get into medical situations by individual names within those constraints, and because we could not get details from the committee, I was unable to nail down when that might have occurred, whether it was L-1, L-2, or whatever.

The main piece of that, though, what I was looking for was, was there a case where a flight surgeon had any kind of a problem that could be a flight safety issue and was disregarded by management, and I could not find any evidence that something like that happened.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I am going to add on to that. I have actually had opportunity to go into that in somewhat more detail through our medical system, ultimately to the flight surgeon who was on the scene, and while I,

too, am bound by the Privacy Act restrictions, I can say categorically that that anecdotal story did not happen. So there was not an impaired crewmember. There was not a flight surgeon who felt that he or she had to stay with the crewmember and monitor his or her status to prevent them from injuring themselves. That did not happen.

MODERATOR: Frank?

QUESTIONER: Frank Moring, Aviation Week. I have a question for Bryan O'Connor.

How did you select your sources? Did anyone refuse to speak to you about this, and just generically, if you were unable to find any evidence, you and the Administrator were unable to find any evidence of this, where do you think these stories came from?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: The first part, Frank, I opened it up by announcement when I first started this to all current people at NASA who had anything to offer, and I got a tremendous amount of e-mails, phone calls, visits in response. In the end, I wound up with 100 percent of the flight surgeons, nearly 90 percent of the current astronauts, particularly a large group of former astronauts, a lot of whom are still at NASA, but in other

functions, and I reached out and specifically asked some folks who haven't been around for quite a while. They have left NASA quite sometime ago because I had to go back about 20 years here, and there are many crews where the entire crew has left NASA a long time ago. So I reached out to try to make sure I had somebody who could speak up for every single flight all the way back for 20 years, and in most cases, I got more than one or two or three, even, crewmembers for those.

So it was a pretty exhaustive -- it was not exhaustive by definition. I didn't hear from everybody, and there was no case where I asked somebody to talk to me and they refused to, which was I think one of the parts of your question.

I have to tell you that the number of witnesses that I had for this short investigation is the highest number that I have ever had for any investigation. I have been investigating accidents since 1972, been on over 20 major accidents and probably as many minor, either as a board member or the investigator, and the only two that I can think of who had more inputs from witnesses were Columbia and Challenger. So I really had a lot of people

that I talked to on this.

MODERATOR: Warren, down in the front.

QUESTIONER: Warren Leary, New York Times, for Colonel O'Connor.

You mentioned that you were not able to verify any case where this might have happened. What was your criteria for verification? Did you require two individuals to verify the same incident, three individuals, a written report from one individual? Just what were the criteria you were using to say you had a verified case or not a verified case?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: The first and easiest part of a verification would be to hear anybody say, "Yes, I was there, and I saw it in person," and I got nothing like that.

I did not try to use any leading questions, by the way. I just asked people to tell me what you think about this situation, is it possible that something like this happened, are you aware of it, did you see anything like this, and then just let them talk to me. Most of the people who talked to me went way beyond what I asked. They talked about not only that, but all airplane flying that I

have seen and so on, but really, I was focused on the specifics that they gave us from the committee.

QUESTIONER: Essentially, it just required one person to say I saw it, and that would have been a verified report by your criteria?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: That probably would have been the first step to verification, and I never got there.

QUESTIONER: Mark Mathews with the Orlando Sentinel, for the Administrator.

You said that the anecdotal story did not happen. Whereas, the report said that it could not verify or was not unsure. What makes you certain that this story did not happen?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, "certain" is a question-begging term, as I am sure you understand, but the essence of the issue resides with the cited statement by a flight surgeon on the scene that such an event occurred. That was the allegation in the report.

So, when the flight surgeon on the scene was contacted through our medical channels, that assertion was denied. The flight surgeon relayed the story of what really happened, and it didn't bear much relationship to

the anecdote and, oh, by the way, did not involve any impairment by alcohol or anything else. So the story didn't occur, as related by the flight surgeon who it was proffered had had the concern. There was not, in fact, a concern.

That gets back to Frank's question of, well, where do these stories come from. Well, I don't know. Millions of families around the country screen their kids' Halloween candy every year because there is an urban legend out there that Halloween candy is poisoned by malicious individuals seeking to harm kids, but in fact, there has never been a documented incident involving malicious handling of Halloween candy.

There is a website for urban legends. Go look it up. There are quite a number of things out there that are cited that are not true. This story is one of them.

QUESTIONER: Patty Reinert with the Houston Chronicle, for the Administrator.

The previous panel who released the report in July mentioned this alcohol, these two incidents, as indicative of a bigger problem of culture at NASA. Could you comment on where that stands? They seem to think there

still is a very significant culture problem.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: And I appreciate that concern.

Now, of course, there are urgent issues and important issues, and then there are issues which are both urgent and important. We felt that it was urgent to get on top of these allegations of alcohol abuse because they, in fact, pose a safety-of-flight issue if true, and so we lost no time. Bryan stepped forward and said, "This is in my area." Shana and I agreed, and he got to it. He has done nothing else for the last month, practically.

We were joking before the conference started that one of his safety organizations at a center did a reorganization, and he didn't even know about it. So he has been pursuing this because it is both urgent and important.

Now, the larger issue -- I'm sorry. Can you say your question again? I got lost in my thought.

QUESTIONER: The issue that --

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Culture issue.

QUESTIONER: -- was about culture during the --

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Thank you. The cultural

issue.

QUESTIONER: -- investigation and then again in July.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Got it.

The culture issue is extremely important, not as urgent.

The concerns over the NASA culture were expressed in the aftermath of Challenger accident and then again in the aftermath of the Columbia accident, and certain unpleasant similarities were raised between the two. I would call your attention to my statements, policies, procedures. Everything I have done since assuming this role as Administrator has been focused on making it quite clear that not only will there not be retribution for employees at any level who bring forward a concern, that there will be praise, there will be respectful treatment of the concern, and there will be an adjudication of it.

Now, I have also said respectful treatment does not imply agreement because any argument or dispute which reaches me has at least two people who disagree and usually more, and it is not possible for me to rule in favor of all parties, but you will get a respectful hearing.

I have established as a nonnegotiable criterion for management at NASA, starting with those who report to me, that they must share this attitude. We do not fail to listen respectfully to our people, and we do not fail to investigate, and we do not fail to act, which is exactly what we did in this case. We received allegations, and we have investigated.

Now, I believe that the culture of this agency, if it was ever in a place where retributive actions were taken against people who brought forth concerns, I don't think that exists anymore. If it does, employees with our governance structure today, every employee of this agency has at least two pathways by which a concern can be brought forward to management, two independent pathways that they are fully empowered to use.

An employee having a concern and being shortstopped at a higher level of management with that concern has another way to get that concern all the way to the top.

It is no secret that I and my deputy and other senior managers are slaved to our In Box. There is no employee in NASA having a concern who need feel that he or

she can't express it and receive a respectful treatment of it.

I realize that those are assertions. Somebody telling you that they are doing the right thing is not the same as being able to prove that they are doing the right thing, and I can never prove a negative. I can't prove that there is not someone out there with a concern who is afraid to express it, but we are now going on two and a half years that I have been in charge of this agency, and whether the concern has been over ice or foam falling off the Shuttle external tank, whether the concern has been scientists who feel that their opinions on global warming are being suppressed, when the concern has been over allegations of astronauts launching in an impaired state, whether the concern was over Inspector General issues, everything has been handled in the same open and straightforward fashion.

I realize that is a very long-winded answer, but you have raised a very important topic. After a certain amount of time when the entire pattern of behavior by the NASA upper management today is of open straightforward handling of real concerns, after a while I expect that

people will say, "You know, this is just how they do it."
So that is what I am looking for people to see.

MODERATOR: We will take one more from here and then go to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida and then come back. Down front here, please.

QUESTIONER: Bill Theobald with Florida Today.

Why not ask the committee or force the committee to tell you the name of the astronaut who apparently told this story about the Shuttle incident and to tell you the source of the other story?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I don't have that power to force. I don't think I should have that power. We don't live in that kind of a country, and I don't want to.

The committee was chartered at our request, and frankly, the credentials of the committee members are quite good. We asked this committee to look at our health care system, particularly behavioral health care, in the wake of the unfortunate incident involving Astronaut Nowak. We wanted to see if there was something that could have been seen in light of hindsight that would have enabled us to spot the fact that she was having problems.

The committee went in a different direction. Having empaneled a committee and ask them to advise us, I think it is improper for me to tell them what advice they can give or what they must say to me. They can say what they wish. We then evaluate what they bring back to us on its merits, and I hope that we are -- the mind-set that I want of people at NASA is when you receive advice, irrespective of the source of the advice, irrespective of whether you agree with it or disagree with it, evaluate the advice on its intellectual merits. Take what is good. Leave what doesn't work. In the end, NASA managers are responsible for what this agency does. Advisory committees are not responsible, but we should listen to advice. We should evaluate it, and we should act on it, and we should take what is good and leave behind what is not. And that is exactly how I treated this report.

QUESTIONER: Just a quick follow-up. You say in the report that the IG's office is investigating. Do they have the power to force the committee to tell them the source of these two allegations?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: The Inspector General does not work for me. They advise me of their findings,

but they do not work for me. There is an independence between the Inspector General and the agency heads per the original IG Act of 1978, and so I don't have any visibility -- and I don't think I should -- into what they are doing or what they can do, and I am not aware of what the rules and restrictions are on their ability to compel testimony or identification or anything like that.

Short answer is I don't know, and the way that the IG Act of 1978 works is I probably shouldn't know.

MODERATOR: Let's go to the Kennedy Space Center in Florida for some questions.

QUESTIONER: Hi. It is Bill Harwood with CBS News. I guess for the Administrator, although really either one of you.

You know, a report like this that is chartered by NASA and comes out and has some fairly explosive allegations, then you guys look into it, and basically, you are saying to the best of your knowledge that those allegations are simply not true. I am just wondering, you know, are there any lessons learned here from your perspective about the nature of how you charter a report like this and how this happens. I mean, this strikes me as

-- I can't recall anything like this in 20 years of covering NASA where a panel came out and made such allegations, and then one month later, you guys said it is just not true. So I am trying to get some context in order to understand how they should look at what you are saying today versus what they said a month ago.

Thanks.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, Bill, you asked a good question. As I said, if I want to preserve what I believe to be the right posture, when I charter an advisory panel, I think it is best if I do not and am not seen to be trying to, if you will, joggle the elbow of the chair of that panel. They should go off and do what they were chartered to do, and we should not interfere, and we should accept their results, but I think it questions the idea of independent advice if you are bothering them while they are working.

Now, they did go in what I considered to be a different direction than I had asked for, but in fairness, there was one line in the charter where I asked them for any other observations. I am not quoting because I don't have it right in front of me, but the essence of the

charter, this one line was any other observations that you think might be helpful to the NASA Administrator. That is fairly broad ground, and they chose to use it.

We have received the comments that they provided in that vein, and we have tried to investigate because, as I have said multiple times, the allegations, if true, are of great concern.

Now, again, we are aware that one can't prove a negative. I can't prove, Bryan can't prove, that there isn't somebody out there with a verifiable story who just now, with all the attention that has been put on this, doesn't want to come forward.

What we can say is looking at Shuttle and T-38 flight times, that the one allegation just cannot be true, and we have looked into the allegation about the Soyuz crewmember, and that also is not true to a very, very high degree of confidence.

So I am sitting up there, if you will, staking what little credibility I may have left and saying I think our guys are doing a heck of a job, and I think they are terrific employees, and I think these allegations are not true based on the investigatory material that Bryan has

brought back.

Earlier on, we were asked the question, well, how do you account then for the stories. I don't know. That's not my job. I can't account. I do not have any possible way that I can account for the fact of how these stories get started.

What I as an agency head and what Bryan as head of Safety and Mission Assurance can do is to investigate the stories and try to find any shred of truth. We have done that. We can't find it, and Bryan was not the only guy who got a bunch of e-mails and communications from former Shuttle astronauts or commanders or flight docs. I, too, have received quite a number of unsolicited communications from people that I know or who are comfortable approaching me directly, and to a person, everyone is saying, "I have never seen anything like this."

At some point, the preponderance of the evidence becomes this behavior didn't happen.

MODERATOR: Another question from Florida?

QUESTIONER: Todd Halvorson of Florida Today with two, if I could.

Bryan, you were a member of the Astronaut Corps

for a long, long time, and you were a Shuttle program manager at one time. So, obviously, you have spent a lot of time in crew quarters over the years, and, Mike Griffin, you have been involved with Shuttle astronaut crews during prior tenures at NASA and the DoD. I am wondering if either of you ever have personally seen an inebriated astronaut or an astronaut under the influence of alcohol suited up for flight on a spacecraft or an aircraft.

COLONEL O'CONNOR: Well, I will answer first. In my career both in the Marine Corps and with NASA as a Marine detailee and 11 years in the crew office, I never saw an inebriated astronaut show up for work, let alone show up for a flight, and I am talking about preflight planning, hours before a flight. I have never seen anybody show up impaired even for that bit of important work, and that, by the way, is what I think is just almost as important as some of the discussions we have had about bottle-to-throttle rules and that sort of thing.

When the crew wakes up in the morning for a Space Station flight or any rendezvous flight, they are just about 11 to 12 hours away from launch. So, when they went to bed the night before, we are talking 18 -- 16 for Soyuz

-- 18 hours before launch. That is a long time.

When I looked at what goes on in the crew quarters, it looked like what I had seen in earlier days when I was down there in the '90s and the '80s, except maybe a little quieter, more focused. These crews are very, very busy on these flights. They have absolutely no motivation to hold up a mission and be blamed for it.

And in the Kazakhstan case, my report points out that there is another big -- what I consider to be a control in this kind of thing, and that is that if an astronaut shows up impaired, whether it be alcohol, an illness, falling down the stairs, hurting themselves in some way, they can be replaced right up until launch day in that operation, and who would want to do such a thing? That was the question I had in my mind, and so I think the controls we have in place for this sort of thing are very good, and the probability of flying an impaired astronaut is extremely low. In fact, I can't even imagine it. I put it in the non-credible category.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: For myself, yeah, Todd, I have in one capacity or another, one agency or another, worked with flight crews, flight controllers, engineers,

operators for 25 years, and I would echo Bryan's comment. I have never seen anybody show up for work impaired, never, not even a close call, ever, never mind for a flight.

I have been a pilot myself for decades. I can't imagine risking my ticket by violating the bottle-to-throttle rule, and I cannot imagine a military pilot whose life depends on such doing that. It is just not credible, and to directly answer your question, no, I have absolutely never seen it.

QUESTIONER: Just a quick follow-up for Bryan. Bryan, what would you say to people who might contend a former astronaut should not be investigating the Astronaut Corps?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I'm sorry, Todd. I am going to answer that one. I am not going to have Bryan speak for himself.

A year or so ago, you guys were quarreling with me and with Bryan, some of you on each side, over a disagreement that we had on whether or not it was safe to launch STS-121. We had a different technical opinion on that issue, and as it happens, we ended up doing it my way, but Bryan was not reluctant to challenge me on that point

at all.

I worked with Bryan on Space Station Redesign which, if any exercise ever presented an opportunity for ethically challenged individuals to skirt things, that would have been the effort.

No one who knows Bryan O'Connor can -- you might disagree with him on something. That's fair, but no one thinks that he lacks anything, has anything other than the highest possible ethical standards. I have appointed or retained people at the top of NASA to whom I would trust my life, and Bryan is one of those people.

I do not come down on the side -- there is always the question in board membership and investigative committees and all that. There is always the question of how do you balance the problem of having independence from the thing being investigated, which usually means you don't know anything -- you may be independent, but you are not knowledgeable -- versus getting knowledgeable people involved, but who, therefore, can't be independent. My solution to that has always been to find knowledgeable people who are not independent, but in whose ethics I have complete confidence, and that is the case here.

There is nobody I would rather have had look at what our situation was in this case than a former astronaut, and again, Bryan and I have disagreed in the past on technical issues. We might do it again tomorrow, but I have zero doubt as to his ethical standards.

MODERATOR: Okay. Let's go for some questions now from Johnson Space Center in Houston.

QUESTIONER: Thanks. Mark Carreau from the Houston Chronicle for Mike Griffin.

Given that the Astronaut Health Care Review, the System Review Committee was established to address an issue that arise over the Lisa Nowak case and the committee responded in a way that was different than you expected, could you sort of tell us or sketch out as much as you can what sorts of improvements that you would like to see in that system now to address the issue of behavioral health for astronauts?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I probably shouldn't have said the committee responded differently than I expected because all but a couple of paragraphs of the committee's report, in fact, were the type of response I expected, and Dr. Williams, Rich Williams, our Chief

Medical Officer, with the other medical professionals at NASA are off evaluating the recommendations and already down the path of implementing a good number of them, and I ran through those item by item in my opening remarks, and I am not going to run through them again because I know it was recorded.

So most of the report, in fact, dealt with the solid nuts and bolts of what we would want to do to make some improvements in our behavioral health care system.

Now, the panel itself said sort of in an "oh, by the way" mode that none of these things necessarily had any connection to the incident with Astronaut Nowak, and they didn't offer that there was any such connection, but nonetheless, they are good things to do, and we are going to work on them.

We have spent almost the entire time of this press conference and all the time of the last press conference talking about a couple of paragraphs in the report that are, again, if it were true, extraordinarily serious and, of course, highly sensational, and that was the part that I didn't expect to encounter.

MODERATOR: We are still in Houston.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. I might follow with another, I hope, short question.

Do you think in light of this whole episode, are there any apologies owed to the Astronaut Corps either by that committee, the news media? I don't know. Anybody?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: That is a hard question for me to answer because I come from the Never Apologize and Never Explain School. You try very hard to figure out what's right. It is not easy to do, and then you do what you think is right.

Colonel Bachmann and his panel did what they thought was right. They took the view that it was their job to collect information and our job to figure out how to handle it and the recommendations that they made, and I don't know that I would differ from that view. I didn't ask for them to be an investigatory body. They presented us with concerns that had been raised to them, and it is my job as agency head to work off those concerns. I understand that. So I don't have any ambiguity over that.

What I am saying is that in the case of these particular concerns, which are, of course, highly serious and highly sensational, we have looked into them, and to

the very best of our ability, going back 20 years, we cannot find experimental data to support the claim. So, as an engineer, I, therefore, believe the claim is not true.

I certainly feel badly that our astronauts' reputations have been besmirched by this. I don't like sensational news coverage, but I can't avoid the knowledge that some news items are indeed sensational, and we just all have to deal with that.

The way I asked our flight crew and our flight surgeons to deal with this is the way that I dealt with it.

I kept my mouth shut until we had some data, and then what we did was to bring forth the data that we had. I don't like, you know, he-said/she-said kinds of arguments. We received some allegations. We investigated. We are presenting to you the data that we have obtained. If we obtain more data, we will present that as well. That is all I know how to do.

MODERATOR: One more question from Houston, I believe.

QUESTIONER: Ryan Korsgard from KPRC TV in Houston, and this is for the Administrator.

What does this safety review say about the

credibility of the Astronaut Health Care System Review overall?

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: That is another question I don't know how to answer.

As I said now several times, the balance of the report that we received from the review was interesting and beneficial on a medic-to-medic basis, and we are pursuing that logically and unemotionally, and we plan to adopt a good number of the recommendations.

The review committee actually was very complimentary, I thought, about most aspects of our health care system, but they had some recommendations about behavioral health care, and that is what we asked them to do.

There has been I think an awful lot of attention to the issues of alcohol impairment. I understand why that is so. That attention is in danger of removing people's attention from the other parts of the report that are more substantive, more solidly grounded, and more beneficial to us, and I don't want that to happen, but I am not Czar of the Media.

MODERATOR: Let's come back to Headquarters.

Seth?

QUESTIONER: Seth Borenstein, AP, again, for Bryan.

I know you don't have the power nor would you use the power to compel the committee to name who said these things, but have you shared your result with either Colonel Bachmann or any of the other committee members and said, "We have come to a different conclusion. Can you help us explain why we find one thing, you say the other?," and sort of figure out why they said one thing and you said the other?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: Well, not exactly the way you said it, Seth.

My charter did authorize me to talk to the committee, and as I was finishing my review -- in fact, it was mid last week, and I had gotten to where I was finding that I was not able to verify these instances -- I called the chairman and I told him. I kind of read to him some of my data and so on, and we talked a little bit. He at that time did offer me, as my report points out -- he did offer me another piece of information that I did not have before on the Soyuz case, and that was helpful, but he reiterated

that the people that they talked to were talking on an expectation of anonymity.

So, early on, I have to say I did approach the committee when I first began this thing and asked if I could have their witness list, exercising a traditional question that is asked in concurrent investigations in my background, where concurrent investigators will share witness lists, but not the witness statements, and therefore be able to make sure that they are seeing the same people and so on. But you can't really do that if they have been promised anonymity, and he pointed that out, and I honored that.

That is why I chose to do a different path here, and that was I am going to have to treat this like an anonymous NASA safety reporting system report that we get into the NASA safety center and investigate independently in that way and go find independently what I can about this issue.

QUESTIONER: When you shared the results with him, do you think you were able to convince him that what you found was accurate, or do you get the impression he dissented from what you found?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: Well, let me point out another thing. The committee chairman reminded me, as they had said when they first presented their report, that, admittedly, the alcohol allegation report in their report was non-verified. They did not verify it. They heard this. They gave it to us to go verify, and so that's the ground rules we played by.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: That gets to the point I made earlier. They did not see themselves, nor were they, in fact, appointed as an investigative committee. They heard some stuff that, if true, was extremely serious. They gave it to us to investigate.

The whole reason we are here is because what they gave us was extremely sensational, but we took it seriously and tried to set aside the sensationalism and tried to investigate and get solid facts, and because it is so sensational, we are back here telling you what we found. You are probably not interested in some of the drier portions of the report, which might actually be of more benefit to us over the longer term.

MODERATOR: Frank?

QUESTIONER: Frank Moring with Aviation Week,

for Bryan O'Connor again.

There is still an anonymous survey, I guess, out there. Do you know the timetable for that and what the scope and questions of that will be?

And then also -- and this is just a generic question -- given that this may go beyond -- well, for example, to the Inspector General -- is there any sort of forensic evidence that is available like blood tests or anything like that, that are routine?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: Okay. First, the survey question, and if I forget the blood test question, remind me, but the survey question, flight crew operations and the medical community at the Johnson Space Center are working together, and I have asked to be a part of this, so they don't put it out without me making sure a couple of my questions are asked.

The purpose of the survey is to look at the broader issue, broader issues of the report. It is not meant to follow up this alcohol by itself.

If somebody on the anonymous survey has something to offer, though, it is a way for them to do it, but the primary purpose of that survey is to look at the broad

questions about reporting the cultural issues we talked about before. Sometimes people are a little bit hesitant in open forum to talk about those sorts of things, and we are offering that as a way to do it.

QUESTIONER: The time table?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: I'm sorry?

QUESTIONER: The time table?

COLONEL O'CONNOR: I think it is sometime in September is what we are hoping for.

Don't forget, though, to me the real ongoing follow-up to any investigation like this of an anonymous tip or allegation is that we have the hotlines which are confidential, and we have the anonymous NASA safety reporting systems, and I have continually reminded people throughout this thing, again, as late as last week, on advice of some people who have been around for a long time and as outsiders watched what I was doing and suggested, you know, some people may not realize they can use the NSRS system to report historical things that might have relevance today. They may think of it as just there is a hazard today. So I even made that -- made sure that the Johnson Space Center put out something on that to everybody

to remind them that they can use that. So that is ongoing.

We have not gotten anything on this topic from that system or the hotlines during my review, but you never know what might happen next week or next year.

The data you were talking about, we don't do testing for alcohol. We have that authority, but no procedures or NASA requirements that we have put in place for anything routine.

You will notice in my report that we talk about where we have some overlaps and gaps in our own policies as far as testing goes, and we are going to take a hard look at that.

Right now, the current policy, the testing that we have regulated within the agency is limited to the security matters of illegal drugs and so on, and we need to take a look at that and see if we need to expand it to anything that could have safety implications. That is one of our recommendations.

MODERATOR: Tracy?

QUESTIONER: Tracy Watson, USAToday. I think a question for each of you.

For Mike Griffin, if you could give me a little

bit more information about the non-drinking event involving a Soyuz crewmember. You said it was not even remotely related to alcohol, and just if I could thoroughly understand what did happen, I think that would be a help.

And for Bryan O'Connor, you recommend that the 12-month -- the list of prohibited activities, 12 months before flight, include drinking to excess, and I am wondering what your definition of that is. It is going to be different for everyone.

Thanks.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, Tracy, I am going to have to disappoint you here. I am sure it would be clearer for you if I could go into more detail, but there are Privacy Act issues. As agency head, I am allowed to know things that I can't talk about, and I can't talk about this, but I do have a detailed description of the incident, the alleged incident that has come up through our medical channels. I do understand what occurred, and what occurred was nothing like the reported allegation and did not -- by the way, not only was it nothing like it, it was not a concern. That is all that I feel that I can say.

So I guess for the people on the press

conference, I am very sorry it comes down to either you believe me or you don't. I can't do anything more for you than that.

COLONEL O'CONNOR: Let's see. My question had to do with the policy that we have had. It turns out it has been in place since 1991, and it replaced another policy earlier, and the topic is high-risk activities for crews that are within a year of space flight.

The modification in 1991, which is still in place today, added professional activities because there was a concern that someone who is in a reserve organization, Army Reserve or Air Force Reserve or Guard or something like that, should try to make arrangements with their unit to avoid high-risk training activities during that year. We hadn't had that covered before, and that is what the thing was, but the basis for that whole thing is use your judgment. Remember, we don't have backup crews for Shuttles. Please use your judgment. When you get within a year, you start getting into a time frame where some of you are not going to be replaceable without moving the mission, and of course, the closer you get to that year, the harder it is to replace people who may have more generic jobs, but

what I suggested in my review was why not add off-duty alcohol consumption because our policies and regulations at NASA apply to on the job, impairment on the job, the effects of alcohol as seen on the job. That is what we have the authority to regulate and to write procedures for.

This thing that we are talking about is a call to use judgment even in off-duty hours, and I thought it was reasonable to add this to the other list of examples that were in that requirement, and the Astronaut Office says, of course, sure, it makes sense.

MODERATOR: Okay. One last question. Thanks.

QUESTIONER: This question is for the Administrator again.

This week, Lisa Nowak filed a notice of an insanity plea in a Florida courtroom. I want to know what is your immediate reaction to that and whether or not this is going to affect or inform some of the ongoing reviews of behavioral health.

ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I don't comment on ongoing legal matters. I'm sorry. It's just not a good place for us to go.

MODERATOR: Okay. That's it. Thanks to

everybody for attending today.

The full report is posted on the NASA website along with the statements that were read today at the conference at www.NASA.gov.

Thank you very much. Have a great afternoon.

[End of NASA News Conference of August 29, 2007.]

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