

NASA Future Forum
March 25, 2008
Lt. Governor Peter Kinder

Thank you, Doug. Good afternoon everyone. First, I'd like to thank Doug and our hosts here today at the St. Louis Science Center. Your continued commitment to education and discovery is paving the path for the next generation of scientific leaders here in America.

I'd also like to take a moment to thank leaders from Boeing for being here today. For more than 90 years Boeing has been a catalyst in the global aviation and aerospace industry. We are grateful for the jobs that have been created here in St. Louis as Boeing continues to design, engineer and manufacture the most sophisticated aircraft in the world.

Earlier, Deputy Administrator Dale and I had the chance to visit about the long and successful relationship between the State of Missouri and NASA. It is an honor for me to be here today to celebrate with you the 50th anniversary of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

50 years ago this summer, America was captivated by what had become an inclusive competition of aptitude and patriotism. The goal was colossal; to put a man into space furthering our exploration into the unknown. Our opposition, the Soviet Union, was leading this race with their launch of the first artificial satellite to orbit the Earth, Sputnik 1.

And, so it was, on July 29, 1958, with a sense of urgency and resolve for the future, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed into law the National Aeronautics and Space Act. A new agency was created to charge this mission; the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

While, in Washington, military officials, scientists and bureaucrats alike began the detailed process of outlining our entry into space, the work was already underway at a sprawling complex over 800 miles away in St. Louis, Missouri. You see, months before the U.S.S.R.'s launch of Sputnik, with clarity in foresight, James McDonnell, known to his tens-of-thousands of employees as "Mr. Mac," had already dispatched 45 engineers to begin the task of developing the first space capsule for manned flight.

With such a "head start" on other competitors, McDonnell Aircraft easily won the contract to build the first space capsules to send an American into orbit. It was St. Louis that quickly became ground zero for what would become "Project Mercury."

On May 5, 1961, America marked its entrance into space. Although, as President Kennedy said, our entry into this race "started late," we persevered to place the first man-an American man, on the moon.

From the foundational success of the Mercury project to the design and production of the subsequent Gemini capsules; our state has been a principal player in technological advances for continued space exploration.

It has been 50 years since we began our relationship with NASA, and I am proud to say that it is still one of collaboration and commitment for future discoveries in the realm of science.

Today, NASA does over \$5.7 million in business with companies here in Missouri. Companies like Burns & McDonnell, United States Semiconductor Corporation, World Wide Technology Incorporated and The Boeing Company are international leaders in the field of aerospace design and engineering. These Missouri companies play a fundamental role in the success of NASA and the future of American space exploration.

We are also proud of the collaboration between NASA and higher education institutions here in Missouri. Over \$7 million in funding is furthering research and learning opportunities on the campuses of the University of Missouri-Columbia and -St. Louis, the Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla and Washington University here in St. Louis.

I truly believe that the work being done in universities across this great state will inspire the next generation of scientists, mathematicians, engineers and future explorers of the cosmic unknowns.

From the industrial to the heroic, Missouri is also home to the finest astronauts in the United States. Col. Tom Akers was born here in St. Louis and grew up in Eminence, Missouri. He was on four space flights and now teaches math at his Alma mater in Rolla, the Missouri University of Science and Technology. Dr. Linda Godwin is from my hometown of Cape Girardeau. She has been on four missions and has accumulated 10 hours of spacewalk time. Dr. Janet Kavandi is from southwest Missouri, and has logged 33 days in space. She now serves as the Deputy Director of Flight Crew Operations at Johnson Space Center in Houston. And Dr. Sandra Magnus, who was instrumental in stealth aircraft design at McDonnell Douglas, is scheduled to begin a two month stay aboard the International Space Station this fall.

I would also be remiss if I did not mention Major Robert Behnken. Robert Behnken was born in Creve Coeur, and grew up down the road in St. Ann. He graduated from high school at Pattonville in Maryland Heights, and then went on to receive degrees in Physics and Mechanical Engineering from Washington University. This past week we saw the stunning images here on Earth as Maj. Behnken, suspended in vast blanket of space, scrupulously made improvements to the International Space Station over the course of three space walks.

Right now, Major Behnken and the crew of STS-123 are preparing to return to Earth after more than two-weeks of technical experiments and improvements made to the Space Station.

Before “blasting off” on March 11, Major Behnken was asked in an interview how growing up here in Missouri impacted who he is today. Here was his response:

“I think the combination of [my] hometown and my family made me the person that I am today. I grew up in more of an area where folks were hard-working, not a lot of folks who were college graduates or engineers. My dad’s a construction worker, teaches at a training school now for construction workers. I think what he instilled in me and what the neighbors that I grew up with in my hometown instilled in me was a work ethic. Hard work is not something to be avoided. It’s something to get accomplished... and then move on.”

As Missourians, we are proud of Major Behnken’s work and the heroism he has displayed over the course of this mission. I will be speaking with Robert once he’s back on this planet and will send him our gratitude and congratulations for a mission well done.

I am excited at what the future holds for NASA over the next 50 years. I know the discoveries, exploration and continued drive for success will surpass our highest expectations for generations to come.

I know our partnership with NASA, as it has for 50 years, will continue to strengthen and mature. Together, we will press forward with innovative research to pioneer a greater understanding on science for all mankind.

I leave you today with a quote from James McDonnell. In a 1967 interview with Time magazine Mr. Mac, with an incessant pursuit for continued success, spoke to future of space exploration here in America.

"This is a frontier good for millions of years," he said. "The only time remotely comparable was when Columbus discovered a whole new world. The creative conquest of space will serve as a wonderful substitute for war. And the revelations of cosmography should shrink our egos down to size."

Thank you.

I would now like to ask Ms. Dale to join me at the podium.

On behalf of the State of Missouri, I would like to present to you this proclamation from Governor Blunt honoring NASA’s 50 years of excellence.