

Remarks by the Honorable Sean O'Keefe
NASA Administrator
Columbia Shuttle Memorial Trust Event
National Press Club
Washington, D.C.
September 16, 2003

Thank you Rich (Richard Gelfond). I appreciate your introduction and the tremendous leadership you are demonstrating on this remarkable effort.

I'd first like to offer my appreciation to Rich and to Shawn Smeallie, a long-time friend. Shawn and I were colleagues in the Senate years ago. He's a gent who has demonstrated an awful lot of capacity in this town on certainly a range of important public policy issues. And this may be the chief among them, Shawn. I thank you for your tremendous dedication.

Thank you also to the distinguished members of the Columbia Shuttle Memorial Trust Steering Committee: Norm Augustine; Guy Bluford, who we will hear from in a moment, a veteran astronaut and gentleman who has been closely associated with NASA for so many years even beyond his time in spaceflight; Charles Bolden, who is also a veteran astronaut and retired Major General in the U.S. Marine Corps; Frank Culbertson, the commander of Expedition Three on the International Space Station, a veteran astronaut in his own right who is a retired

captain in the U.S. Navy--It's a pleasure to be with you Frank; General Jack Dailey, who is the Director of the National Air and Space Museum and former Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps at the time I had the privilege and honor of serving as Secretary of the Navy; Richard Edelman; Brian Grazer, who as was mentioned earlier along with Ron Howard, who were instrumental in producing Apollo 13; Alan Horn and Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, who also has been deeply involved with NASA in the activities and the issues of space exploration for many years.

Today, we are seeing the full force of the generous spirit on display of their dedication to this activity.

Also, the support and advice of Senator John Glenn as we've worked our way through this tragedy has been just inspiring. His continued support and willingness to help the families of fellow astronauts as well as all who are dedicated to the objectives of exploration, is something that again continues to inspire us all.

It is an honor in this circumstance to represent all of the NASA family to support this wonderful effort to honor the tremendous legacy of astronauts Rick Husband, Willie McCool, Mike Anderson, Dave Brown, Kalpana Chawla, Laurel Clark and Ilan Ramon.

Exactly eight months ago, on January 16, we saw these seven astronauts head into space with smiles on their faces, and as their

families so eloquently observed, with “hearts full of enthusiasm, pride in country, faith in their God, and a willingness to accept risk in the pursuit of knowledge—knowledge that might improve the quality of life for all mankind.”

And once in space they tirelessly worked on research aimed at bettering our lives—research to help fight cancer, improve any number of agricultural efforts, develop fire-suppression techniques, build earthquake-resistant buildings...and a number of different research efforts that were all dedicated to important tasks that could only be performed in that microgravity condition.

We miss these family members more than words can express.

The dedicated men and women of NASA are now working hard to honor our solemn commitment to the families of the Columbia crew that we identify the problems, and I think that's been accomplished as a result of the Columbia Accident Investigation Board's work, that we correct those problems, and rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of knowledge that their loved ones gave their lives to.

We have also made a solemn pledge to always be at the side of the families and to seek many ways to honor the incredible legacy of their loved ones.

Today, the creation of the Columbia Shuttle Memorial Trust represents an important step forward in allowing the American public to join with all of us in honoring this pledge.

By helping to provide for the needs of the families, including the future education of their sons and daughters, the support of the Trust will enable these young men and women to continue exploring new horizons with the same joyful spirit that characterized their parent's voyage of exploration and discovery on our behalf.

I might add that it was just a little over a month ago that the family members demonstrated again part of their indomitable spirit of exploration and discovery in their own right as they joined astronaut Scott Parazynski in climbing to the top of the recently named Columbia Point, a prominent vista on Colorado's Kit Carson Mountain that now honors the memory of the Columbia STS-107 crew.

We're also gratified that through these efforts to memorialize their mission and this crew, the Columbia Shuttle Memorial Trust will help ensure that the American people never forget the accomplishments of the astronauts and will continue to be inspired by their quest to explore the heavens on our behalf.

I am most appreciative of the selfless effort that has gone in to the creation of the Columbia Shuttle Memorial Trust. This

initiative, supported by some of America's most recognized leaders, will undoubtedly bear a tremendous return. I am confident that the work of the Trust will serve as a reminder to all of us how much the Columbia astronauts and their families have touched the American spirit, and indeed the people of the world. And I thank you for establishing this fitting tribute to these important people. Thank you all very much.