

NASA JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

MARK S. GEYER
INTERVIEWED BY JENNIFER ROSS-NAZZAL
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ROSS-NAZZAL: Today is December 3rd, 2020. This interview with Mark Geyer is being conducted for the JSC Oral History Project in Houston, Texas. The interviewer is Jennifer Ross-Nazzal, assisted by Sandra Johnson. Thanks again for taking some time to meet with us this month. We really appreciate it. We're a little behind in your yearly update because of COVID. But I thought we'd start by going back to March. We were just chatting about that. How closely was NASA and the Johnson Space Center monitoring things? We had heard about a virus at that point, but was the Center really focused on that? Were they looking at things in preparation?

GEYER: Thanks, Jennifer. I appreciate the question. Actually, as I mentioned earlier, I had to go back and look. It's been so long, 10 months. I had to go back and look in my calendar and remember the events to piece together exactly the transition, because it happened so quickly. I was still traveling a lot for work even up until Demo-2. We were having meetings in Washington [DC, NASA Headquarters] and Kennedy [Space Center, Florida].

Just to give you a sense for when things were almost normal last time, we had an event on a Saturday, it was a memorial event for Stacey [T.] Nakamura, who was a longtime Safety guy, did great work for us, passed away. There were no masks at that event. The usual Gilruth [Center] event where you're sitting 6 inches from somebody, and people are speaking at the podium. Great event, and we did a little outdoor tree thing. That was a big event, no masks. That was end of February.

I'd done something to my finger on a trip, and I went to the hospital, Clear Lake Regional, maybe four or five days before that. I don't remember wearing masks, but I do remember there were hand sanitizers and people were starting to think about it. That's an external event, which I remember; it was starting to come about.

I remember being in DC in early March. I think the president shut off travel from Europe. We had some guys from ESA [European Space Agency] that were supposed to come support a Space Station event and I got a call from the program manager from Station saying, "Hey, should I bring these guys over when we know this travel ban is going to happen?" We said no. That was early March. I remember it starting to happen, but it still seemed external then. It's out of control over there, so we're going to shut down travel from China and Europe.

It was early March where it started moving pretty quick. I went back and looked at my e-mails, and those different stages. Headquarters created a process, which was actually really helpful where they created different stages. It was one through four. Stage one is like normal. It's pretty much normal. Each stage increasing numbers of people do not come to work. There's a stage four, which is basically the Centers close. I liken that to a hurricane. It's like man, you're just trying to keep the power running, but no one's coming to work. Stage three is mission-essential and mission-critical work. Stage two, I can add more people, as long as I can do it safely, but it's still very rigorous.

We went officially to stage two, which was basically if you could work from home, go work from home. But if you had work in labs or MOD [Mission Operations Directorate] or managers felt like they needed to come in, you could come in. I remember my e-mail actually said, "If you really feel like you can't get your work done at home, you can come in." It was that open. That was on the 14th.

Then on the 18th, we were stage three, and some Centers went to stage four on that date. I remember Ames [Research Center, Moffett Field, California] especially, because you remember there was an outbreak in northern California. They were the first one to go to four, and then many others followed suit within that week.

[Deputy Director] Vanessa [E. Wyche], she can talk about this. In early April we were in I would call stage 3.8. It was just mission-essential, just folks for ISS [International Space Station] and Commercial Crew. Even important work on Orion for schedule we did not allow on-site in early April. So we went from two on the 14th to three on the 18th to really a 3.8 within a week after that. It was like bang bang bang because everybody was like, “What the hell is going on? We need to flatten the curve.” We sent everybody home.

Then we kind of got into a rhythm, I would say, about how it was working, although it was fairly bumpy. Vanessa can talk about this when you go through the PIRG [Pandemic Incident Response Group] things. Every org, even in this 3.8 stage, and most of it was Flight Ops, but you had Engineering and SA [Human Health and Performance] and others that had people involved. They all had a little bit different processes, a little bit different implementation relative to the masks, especially at the beginning while we were figuring it out. Eventually that coalesced into a common approach.

Then the middle of May, I think it was the 18th of May, we went back to what I would call an open stage three, which we allowed for schedule-critical work to come on-site too. Orion had some critical hardware that needed to be done and people had to be on-site, and we allowed that. That was middle of May where we went to I would say a normal stage three.

That was the big thing. Of course, in October we went to stage two. The numbers started coming down. They’d been coming down for a while, but we really weren’t comfortable going

to stage two. Stage two is really if your work is better to be done on-site. It's like my job. I can do most of my job from home, but I'm more effective when I'm here and when I can have some meetings face to face even though they're distanced. We have also people who work in labs and other things that the work had built up and they needed to come in. That's stage two. Stage two only added about 400 people, but we've been in that since the 19th. I can tell you I think in a week we're going to go back to three, because I think the case counts in Harris County are too high.

At the beginning it was like, "Oh my God, let's go!" Boom, we were in stage 3.8, and now we've kind of learned how to manage it. We've added some in, and we may pull some back before Christmas. But I think we're learning how to live and manage in this strange environment.

I think about flying Demo-2, flying Crew-1, the Orion work. Orion is just about buttoned up. Gateway had gotten through PDR [preliminary design review]. The EVA [extravehicular activity] guys getting through their PDR. Things are happening, and the teams are able to do a lot of it online, most of it online. They've done a great job when you think about it. If this had happened 10 or 15 years ago, it would have shut us down. We wouldn't have had the technology to continue to work together as well.

It's a long strange story, and we're not done. We were just talking, I'm glad to hear the vaccine is coming. In my note to the team and in the town hall is, "You need to wait." I don't think we're going to get a vaccine in this area till February, maybe January for critical workers, but it won't be us. It could be summer before enough of the workforce has the vaccine that we go back to a stage one. It could be a while.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Things have definitely been topsy-turvy for a while. What were some of your major concerns as Center Director when all of this was happening, and it was happening so rapidly?

GEYER: One of them was who actually knows what the hell is going on and what we should do. I felt like Headquarters did an awesome job, and I felt like we were really lucky at Johnson because we have Occupational Health experts here. We have doctors here who can interpret what the CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] is saying, and our occ health guys can interpret CDC guidelines for this facility. Because at the beginning who were the experts? Who do you talk to?

I think it was March in the town hall. I was like, “We’re used to getting the experts and listening to them,” just like hurricanes. The National Hurricane Center, these are the people that we listen to, and we create a plan around that. That’s why I said, “We’re going to listen to the CDC, and we’re going to plan around that with Terry [Terrance A.] Taddeo and the other doctors.” Bob [Robert] Martel, Sean [R.] Keppta, and the Occupational Health guys, they’ve been awesome. That was my one [concern], where are the experts so I can really figure out a plan? If I just listen to the media—and I’m not one of those who hate the media—but if I just read the paper or listened to TV, I’m not going to get what I need to create a plan.

Headquarters pointed us in the right direction, but I still felt like the CDC stuff needed interpretation for us. I thought we were really lucky. That was number one. You get all sorts of opinions; you still get all sorts of opinions. I still get questions at town hall. Somebody points me to a YouTube guy. It’s like, “I’m not going to listen to some guy on YouTube. I’ve got to

listen to Terry. Terry is going to do his best to interpret CDC [guidance].” That was number one.

I was worried about Demo-2. I was worried about Commercial Crew and doing a flight readiness review [FRR] and getting all those products signed off. It’s hard enough. This is the first time where we’re certifying human flight for a SpaceX vehicle. SpaceX is a great team, but they make mistakes. They’ve made mistakes in the past. They’re human. Are we really going to be able to do [the work we need to do]? Are the teams going to get the data they need and have the interactions they need? Are we going to have the interactions we need at a flight readiness review to fly Demo-2? We need to get Demo-2 up there, because if we’re not careful we’re going to have no Americans on ISS, which would be really bad. That was the second thing.

Just right on top of it, holy cow, we’re rolling into FRR in April, then this thing blows up. So you’re talking to the Engineering guys and the Safety guys and the crew, Commercial Crew Program, Flight Ops. “Can you do it? Do you have time? How’s it going relative to the reviews?” I felt like Engineering did a really good job of breaking up the reviews and accommodating the inefficiency of Teams meetings in how they did that, so that their team could get through it.

We got through it. I remember we went to the FRR at Kennedy. At that time, it was so late in April, May that we got to fly the Gulfstream. Aircraft Ops, under FOD, has two Gulfstreams. They have a G-V and a G-III. I think we were on the G-V. The week before I’d flown commercial to Florida, we were still doing that, but then we flew the Gulfstream to keep everybody separate. The meeting, we were all 6 feet apart. We had to wear our masks to get up

and leave. That was the first big meeting I remember where we were trying to adapt. That was my second thing. Sorry I got off track.

ROSS-NAZZAL: It's all interwoven.

GEYER: Yes. Can we get through that and do it well? We've done Crew-1 since then. But I can tell you that that team, Engineering and all [of them], they are very stressed. It was a tough year for them to get all that done. Then we just had CRS [Commercial Resupply Service mission]-21, this cargo flight SpaceX is flying to ISS that's got a lot of new stuff, [it's] some of the same team. It's been a long year for them, so we've got to watch out for them. Those were the first two things, like, "What the hell do I do with this, and then can we get through these flight readiness [reviews] effectively?"

ROSS-NAZZAL: Did you get any pushback from any of the orgs by saying, "We're moving to stage two, stage three"?

GEYER: No. They were all part of this environment. They knew we've got to start flattening the curve; we got to move out. No, I really didn't have any. No, I feel like everybody supported, "Look, we need to go home if we can." The struggles—and Vanessa will have more of this in hers—was when we decided to try to add more tasks back in I would say. Some people—it's human—are more fearful about what they don't understand even in large organizations. There was a lot of that trepidation at the beginning, but we worked through it. With the Center Ops

guys under Joel [B.] Walker protecting areas and making sure they were spaced [out], we worked through all that.

At the beginning no, I wasn't getting pushback [from] people, "I'm not going home." I didn't get any of that. It was more as you try to add back in. Now it's been 10 months. When I wanted to go to stage two there were some people that were still very uncomfortable, and we tried to be really clear. "You do not have to come in." I keep saying that, but it's hard for people. But I had a lot of people, and some of these were the managers, "God, I can't wait to be able to come back in, even if it's for just a couple of days," because they missed it, and also there's a little bit of that psychological break between home and work. Even to have just a couple meetings a day where you're actually in the same room with someone.

Just an aside. We were already shut down for a while when Demo-2 docked, and I remember being in the [Mission Control Center, MCC] viewing room, and at that time we were still letting people in. I think Senator [Ted] Cruz had some of his family there. [Congressman Brian] Babin was there. At the beginning it was just [NASA Administrator] Jim [James F.] Bridenstine, [Deputy Administrator] Jim [James W.] Morhard, [Associate Administrator for Communications] Bettina [Inclán], and some other folks from Headquarters, [Associate Administrator Stephen G.] Jurczyk.

I'd had some health stuff, so I didn't have a lot of energy, but I went to that event. I'm sitting in there talking to them, and I wasn't euphoric, I just felt really good. When I went home, I was just talking to my wife and I just realized, because that was the first time in a month I'd been with people from work. You've got to be careful how you say that to your wife, because you're with your wife all [the time]—but I said, "It's just different." I actually was interacting

with people about work. There's a psychological thing about that, and I just realized, "Wow, that was really intense."

When we talked stage two, some people were going, "Thank you, we need to do some amount [of work on site]." Now you've got to be careful. It's not whoever wants to come in, it's got to be a task that makes sense. I think two gives us that flexibility, stage two.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I think we've seen some of that on our team. Some people they're just chomping at the bit, they really wanted to come in, and then there are some of us who were a little bit more hesitant, who wanted to stay home.

GEYER: Yes. Depends where you sit. If you're around people that are at risk or you've got kids and you're worried about that part, that's different, and that makes perfect sense. That's why it's not one-size-fits-all for everybody too.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You have been very clear. I will say that. I thought we would turn, since you've given some personal anecdotes—if you would talk about how COVID has really changed your day-to-day work schedule. If you would talk about that.

GEYER: Yes, it's changed it a lot. It's changed it a lot. The Teams thing, especially in the summer, started to become a problem for me, because we would have back-to-back-to-back-to-back-to-back-to-back Teams meetings. You probably have been there too. Psychologically I'm not getting a break here. Yes, the bathroom is only 30 feet from me, and the kitchen is right over here, so if I want to go eat, it's a lot easier. But I've just got no time. I've got no time.

Those interactions that you might have, like staff meetings breaking up and you can go talk to this person, “Hey, I need you to go do this; hey, I heard this happened to you.” Well, now I got to schedule a meeting to have that conversation.

Or I walk down the hall and talk to Kevin [N. Window] and Julie [Kramer-White] in Engineering, say, “I’m hearing this thing that’s going on. What’s your sense?” I just poke my head in the door and get it done. Now I got to have a meeting to go have that done. Again, we’re blessed to have the technology, but it’s still less efficient in my mind. It’s still less efficient.

That built up. [Things kind of came to a head in July], “This is not going to work.” Vanessa and I figured out a way to break things up, and I was lucky because I had Vanessa, so she would take other things that I would skip, and then we would put a little bit of space between the meetings. Now Headquarters, they don’t care about that sometimes when they schedule meetings, and I’ve just got to deal with it so that part has been there.

But I think we’re in a groove now. I miss the gym being open, because I have to walk a long way to get the same [workout]. And my wife keeps saying, “Why don’t we buy an elliptical?” It’s like “Yes, I’m going to buy that thing, and then I’m going to have a vaccine in like a month,” I’m convinced. So that’s been a problem. I mean it’s not a serious problem.

One of the things though I’d say that’s funny, it’s a blessing and a curse, I’ve had some health things where there have been days where I really couldn’t come to work. You just get like, “I don’t feel good enough to come to work.” It’s not like I’m contagious. I just don’t feel good enough. I can do Teams meetings. I can do most of what I would do. I don’t turn the video on, or I can tie in. Where if I had to come to work to do those meetings, I would be out.

It's funny that it actually enables me to stay tied in where I might not have been able to before. So that's an interesting funny thing this year that would not have been the case last year.

I would say those are the big things. I do think we still lose a lot. The video helps, because I can see you, I can see your expressions, but it's not the same, especially in a tense or difficult conversation. Those are still harder to do in this environment. You still have personnel issues; you still have stresses across teams that you just don't get the same indicators that would help. I've seen that. I've seen that in some cases with orgs and others where these tensions have not really gotten better. I think part of that is it's just hard over the video. I think that's part of it.

At the beginning, my two boys were at home. One already has a job, but he's not supposed to go to work, so he was upstairs working for a contractor. Another kid is at [Texas] A&M [University, College Station], so for a while he stayed home, and he was here [at home], which was great and also hard. My wife was working, so she's working in the den, I'm working in the dining room, I got two boys upstairs. I had to buy a desk for one of them. The other one sleeps till noon. It was good to have them around, but it was hard to have four people working in the same house. Working in a sense. Three of us, and one that was at school.

The boys eventually decided it was too boring at our place, so they went back to A&M. One because he's already a student up there, and the other because he has a lot of friends, so they can live anywhere, so they do. That's interesting. They've both had COVID by the way. Both of my boys have had it. My middle child, he's recently had it; he's feeling much better now. They both had it. They're 23 and 22, so that's different.

I don't know about you guys, but I haven't really had a vacation. I've taken time off. Yes. Then what do I do? I paint something in the house. I can't go anywhere. What am I going

to do? So that stress is still there, it doesn't really go away. I don't know, I'm whining a little bit, I know some people don't even have a job, but that's there, [that feeling]. I'm looking forward to the two weeks at Christmas hopefully, but I'm not going anywhere.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You really can't at this point.

GEYER: Yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Has there been anything enjoyable about working from home or doing a hybrid of going to work and sometimes working from home?

GEYER: Yes, I think there's some. I'm not traveling as much, and some of these short trips to Kennedy and Headquarters, I think they can be done remotely. It can wear you down getting on a plane and flying and getting there late and going to the Marriott. It's the same [experience every time] and then you try to get something to eat. I like traveling, but for those repetitive trips, short, up and back, it can wear you out. So I haven't had to do any of that, that's really good.

My commute is 5 minutes, 6 minutes, so it hasn't really helped my commute any. I know some people it's been a huge help for them. My wife and I get along great, so we've been doing a lot of puzzles together, something that has no intrinsic value, but it's something to do. That's good, that's been working out okay. I took up some hobbies that I haven't done in a while just because I'm not traveling, not doing other things. Yes, those are positive things.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What's it been like working on-site? What have you seen? Obviously there's not as many people, but what have you witnessed when you come to work in Building 1?

GEYER: It's just empty, it's just empty. Now in stage three especially if I saw somebody walking in it was odd. Stage two, I'm seeing more people. Stage two, my secretary [Tristyn I. Meza-Goble] and Vanessa's secretary [Christina M. Liggio], they rotate. People are here now. It's just the emptiness. It's just weird. I don't walk around. Normally as a good boss it's good to walk around, see how people are doing. But I just don't think that's what we're asking people to do, so I don't walk around in other people's buildings, because I think we're supposed to stay where we're supposed to work. That part is odd, that part is odd, yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Have people dressed differently at work? Or are they still continuing to dress up?

GEYER: I dress up. I wore this collared shirt and my work slacks, just because I feel like I'm at work, I should. Most people do that I run into—I haven't seen a lot of change yet. But I'm sure if you're in a lab and it's you, what the hell, I'd wear jeans too. Why not? Why not? Yes. I haven't noticed it, but I bet it's true. Why not?

ROSS-NAZZAL: Have you had much interaction with any other colleagues? Or is it primarily you and the secretaries?

GEYER: Vanessa, she comes in usually. But that's it, fundamentally. When we do staff we have to be so spread apart that we have to do it in 966 now, and maybe four of the senior leaders come, the rest tie in by Teams. Still good to see some people. We have a couple meetings where we do have some people in the room, which is good.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Has that been the case always with senior staff while this has been going on for the past 10 months?

GEYER: No, that was only stage two did we try to do a staff meeting together with some people. The rest has all been remote. It's all been Webex or Teams since end of March. It works okay; it works okay. I do have to bring up the org chart just to make sure I call on everybody. Usually in the room I can see [everyone], and they all sat in certain places. Now it's just a bunch of circles.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Is there one memorable event or moment for you so far in the midst of the pandemic, either working at work or at home, anything that stands out?

GEYER: I think when the crew came through the hatch on Demo-2, and we went down on the floor of MCC. What's memorable about that is that even though that was late May, we were in transition about figuring out what the heck to do still, so we were all caught up in this event and the PAO [Public Affairs Office] guys hadn't really thought about the fact that we're going to be passing this phone around. We all stood apart, but you had to pass a phone. I'm passing it to Cruz, and they're passing it to Jim. We didn't have masks on because we're like, "I'm going to

talk into this phone.” We got done with that event, and then people sent me notes. I go, “Yes, yes, we just got caught up. We didn’t really think it through.”

What’s memorable about it, it was a great event. We actually had Commercial Crew deliver people. [Astronauts] Bob [Robert L. Behnken] and Doug [Douglas G. Hurley] did a great job. They were on ISS. It was exciting. It was great to have the senator and the congressman. That’s how big a deal it was. It was a JSC flight control team. Everybody was celebrating, it was a really good event, good dialogue with the crew. But we were still like, “I don’t think we know how to handle this yet.” That’s what I remember.

I got some grief at one of the town halls. I said, “Hey, you’re right, we’re still figuring this out.” I think you said it [earlier], Jennifer. You go out and your brain is like, “Oh, crap, I need this mask.” It’s still not a habit, especially if you’ve lived long enough. I’m 62 now, 61 years I didn’t do any of this. Now I am supposed to figure it out? That’s what I remember, that confluence of events, a really cool great moment. “Oh, hang on, we’re still not really figuring out how to do this COVID thing.”

In Crew-1, [Associate Administrator for Human Exploration and Operations] Kathy [Kathryn L. Lueders] talked to the crew when she was sitting in Studio A. We were all sitting there. In fact they had people in B and A, and we were completely separated. We didn’t go down on the floor of MCC, and we didn’t pass the phone around. We figured it out. It wasn’t as cool because of how we had to do it, but that’s okay. We needed to be safe, and we needed to show people what we were doing. Yes, I would say that was the big event.

The other one I would say when I look back at this year, it’s funny, gosh, what a crazy year it’s been! I think of George Floyd’s murder. I’d been in the hospital for something, and I looked at the TV like, “Holy cow, what in the world is going on?” When I started talking about

it at the town hall. “Hey, this is a big dang deal, and I want to make sure that we’re talking about it, because while I don’t think we’re going to replicate that event here, I think there are still barriers here at JSC. We want the best team; we should talk about that. What does that look like? What do the barriers look like?” I thought that was great; I thought the team did a great job in stepping up in each org.

I talked to the senior leaders. I said, “My expectation is that you would have these conversations within your teams just like we had at senior staff.” They ran with it. I didn’t really have to convince them, some more than others. That’s natural.

One thing I’ll remember. In the town halls we would ask for questions, if you have questions. One week, wow, I got a lot of questions about that. The good news is people were open enough to really ask me, even if I was surprised by what they said. Responding to those questions, I’ll never forget that town hall. It was recorded too, but it’s like man, I had to pray about that. I had to really think hard about how I was going to answer those questions.

It was important. I wanted people to ask questions. I don’t want everybody to just give up and run away from the conversation. That was the other big moment. Now unfortunately since it’s all Teams, and it’s over these questions, I feel like we’re losing the opportunity to really talk about it. Like I said before, being able to watch your expressions and make a connection I don’t think we’ve been able to do that. Hopefully we can do better when there’s a vaccine, and we can try to pull on that again. We’re not giving up. We’re still having these conversations. For the hard ones, the folks that disagree, how do we have that dialogue? I’m hoping to continue that next year, but I’ll never forget that one. It’s like, “Wow, what am I going to do?”

It was good because we obviously were stirring something up. We were talking about something really hard, and it was creating some very strong emotions. This Center is not immune from that. People feel that. They come to work, and that's the way they feel. If we're not open to looking at those barriers, we're never going to be different. It was important. But it was tough. In the midst of everything else that was really really interesting too.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I know we all, [those on our contract], talked about [that town hall], because I know the questions were difficult. It looked very challenging for you, so we were happy we were not in the hot seat.

GEYER: I didn't look at the camera. I keep looking [down]. I still have this thing where I prefer to look at you or look at me to see if something's wrong with what I look like. So I'm looking down here, and the camera is up here. I remember that too. It didn't film very well. But yes, those are the two. Plus the two launches, which were just phenomenal. Those were great.

ROSS-NAZZAL: You've had a number of town halls here at JSC. Do you think that's the best way to continue dealing with folks? We always get the opportunity to upvote or downvote questions, and some of the questions have turned into arguments or places for people to grandstand on issues. Have you thought about other ways [to communicate]? Or you still think that's the best way to get out information?

GEYER: That's a really good question. I do think the town halls are important. A lot of people are still looking at them. We get about 3,000 people within the first day. That's about a third of

the Center. I think other people probably look at them later. For those that are interested, I think it helps. It's been a great way for Vanessa and Terry to talk about what our strategy is, and Terry to answer these medical concerns, which is really important. I think that part is really good.

I thought the Q and A was very helpful at the beginning. But the last couple times I'm like, "Wow, I just feel like people are bored with this, or they're not taking it serious." Frankly, I feel like there's some people I'm just not going to convince. They're worried. I can say I'm using CDC [guidelines] and I can say this was our strategy, and they're just never going to get there. That's okay; that's okay. But I feel answering it again and again I'm not sure is helpful. That's why we took a break from the questions for a while. We'll get into January [and revisit the option].

I do think there needs to be feedback or input. I would like to maybe get to the point where we can tie people in and they can ask questions live as opposed to this [UStream video], because also I think if they're asking it and you can see them or hear them I think they're less likely to ask the really stupid ones or the mean ones. I just think they will. So I think maybe we'll look at that next year. When we first rolled it out I wasn't sure how helpful it would be. We were doing them every two weeks for a while, and I think they were really really helpful for people, because that's the feedback we got. "What's going on?"

This COVID churn, we just talked about it going from 2 to 3 to 3.8 to 3. People were worried and it just helps when they can see somebody say, "I've seen it, we have a plan, here's how it looks." Can really help people focus on their work. I think we'll keep doing it. I would like to make the questions more interactive, if we can.

ROSS-NAZZAL: As things started to shut down, were you involved at all in discussions with Space Center Houston? Because that obviously affected their business model, no longer could they bring people on-site to do tours; they couldn't come in buildings. Was that something that you were involved with?

GEYER: Yes. We have tagups with William [T.] Harris on a regular basis. One of the first ones we had, I'm sure it was in March, and he was pretty sure they were going to be shut down for a while. He actually was more pessimistic than I was. He was saying, "Oh, I think we're going to be shut down till the fall." I was like, "Oh, I don't think it will be that bad." But he was right.

We definitely want to support them. I think they've done a really nice job. They're on sound financial footing. We have not allowed them back into MCC. I'm just not comfortable with those folks [potentially being exposed]. That's our mission-essential work, so I don't think we're going to bring people back into MCC until the vaccine is here. Building 9, in stage two, people can come up in that walkway. They're really not interacting with the workforce at all. There's no risk of that tram [exposing employees]. You're outside. Certainly we know if you're walking anywhere you should think 5 percent of the people you're hanging out with have this thing. That tram coming through, 5 percent of those people have probably got it. The fact that they're outside, they go in, they do not interact with the workforce at all, and they leave, Building 9 is fine.

I think if we go back to three we'll probably have that conversation. Vanessa will have that conversation whether that Building 9 thing should continue or not. It was not originally in three, but we might be getting comfortable. It's probably okay. But MCC, I think no. It's too close to the mission-critical folks. They do walk in the building.

Yes, we definitely talk to William. He's done a great thing for this area and for NASA's mission, getting the word out. He's done a terrific job turning that place around, so we want to help him, yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, it's an amazing place. They brought in a lot of great exhibits recently.

GEYER: Yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Were you involved in discussions at all with the school district? So many people live in this area. Were there discussions with the superintendent and folks over there?

GEYER: No. Not really. We reacted to what they did, and that was part of trying to make sure we were supportive of the workforce, if they needed to be home because now their kids aren't going to school. That was a lot of stress, especially right after maybe August. School is starting up. What are they going to do? No, we didn't talk to them. We listened to the reports.

ROSS-NAZZAL: I was just curious about that, if that played a role in decisions for staging at all.

GEYER: Not for us, but certainly it's important to know because you got a lot of your workforce that's going to have to deal with that and has had to deal with it.

ROSS-NAZZAL: What about the city of Houston or Harris County, Galveston County? Have you been in contact with them, in touch with them, about decisions about whether or not to keep people on-site?

GEYER: Fundamentally no. We're still a pretty small part of the city, although we have a great relationship with the mayor of Houston and surrounding mayors too are very supportive.

We would see those [stay-at-home] orders. Now some of our people would talk to the city people about the orders and what they meant. But we have an exemption as a federal facility, so we had the freedom to do what we thought we needed to do, even with those orders. There was a time where we thought some of our travelers would need a letter from me, because they were shutting down travel, and if people had to go to Florida for a flight or something they might need a letter from me, "I'm a federal employee. I'm exempted from the travel restriction because of mission-essential work."

I think there was a couple weeks there where we were thinking I'd have to print out all these letters. In the end we didn't do that. The state didn't make it too rigorous, and we felt like we could deal with it after the fact, because they were just taking people's names at the beginning and saying, "You need to report back." We said, "If you get into this situation we'll deal with it then, and we'll let them know you're a federal employee and you're exempted." They weren't actually arresting people at the border or stopping them.

We did do some early work there when Galveston County and Harris County were shutting things down. We realized we were exempted, and our employees would be okay.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Have you had any feedback from the local community? I think you gave a presentation in March to the Bay Area economic council. I can't think of the [term] right now.

GEYER: BAHEP [Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership], yes.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, that's who I'm thinking of. Have you had any feedback from them about the closure and its impact on local restaurants, shops, those sort of things?

GEYER: Yes. My discussions with BAHEP, a lot of those are companies that support us, and then local businesses. The companies that support us, we really haven't discontinued any work, so those folks are getting paid. Those guys are doing okay. But yes, the restaurants and other things have definitely taken a hit. As far as what we can do other than follow the guidelines, it's hard for us. I get it. Personally I do get takeout or curbside I would say a third, maybe a quarter of the week. I'll say a quarter. It used to be half. I'd say it was closer to half I would go out to eat. Now it's a quarter. I do some of that just because I like the variety, but also because I'm worried about some of these businesses [closing their doors].

But no, I haven't had any conversations at all. I'm not sure what I would do differently. I have to follow our guidelines, and I've been really careful to tell our workforce. They've done a great job.

I think we might have had one case. I think we've had one case where we've spread the disease in the Center. In other words, someone came in, they were positive, and they spread it to someone who was also in [the Center gates]. I think maybe once in 10 months, because we trace every one, and we look at that. A lot of that has to do with people being careful when they're

here but also being careful when they're home, so not bringing it in. I think the team has done an awesome job with that.

But yes, that does mean though that you can't go to some of these places you used to go to. When they opened up like two months ago, three months ago, and I started going to my favorite restaurant, it was great at the beginning when it was 25 percent full. But when they went to supposedly 50 percent, it was way too crowded for me. "I can't come here." It's just a risk level that you decide with your job you can't do it. But I feel bad for these companies. I know some of them have been around forever.

I just talked to my dry cleaner. He might not stay in business. I've been taking my stuff to him for 25 years. I just don't have enough cleaning. I don't wear the suit [regularly]. I used to wear it all the time. Now I hardly ever wear a suit. In stage three, hell, I maybe wear slacks once a week. That's the kind of things that's hitting those people. It's rough.

ROSS-NAZZAL: Yes, it's a different world. I was just curious because I know JSC has such a huge impact on this area. Just wondering about some of those things, you never know until you ask. I'm looking at our time right now. This might be a good place for us to stop, although it's not on a very upbeat note. Maybe we can schedule some more time this month or next month. I know you've got a heavy calendar, but we can arrange some more time to talk about COVID and also all the other missions and some other questions I had for you.

GEYER: Yes, that'd be good.

[End of interview]