

NASA Administrator Charles Bolden's Remarks
National Air and Space Museum
Apollo 40th Anniversary Celebration
Monday, July 20, 8 p.m. EDT

Thank you, Neil [deGrasse Tyson] for that introduction. It's a privilege to be here tonight. I would like to take a moment to thank the National Air and Space Museum for hosting this tremendous event. Let's give them a big round of applause.

I also would like to thank all of the many very distinguished guests who are in attendance this evening. We are honored by your presence. And last but certainly not least, I would like to thank the Apollo astronauts who are here tonight. We are here to celebrate your landmark achievements. The Apollo astronauts are heroes in the

truest sense of the word. Their dedication and bravery in exploring part of President Kennedy's New Frontier is a pivotal moment in human history that still will be celebrated thousands of years from now.

On July 20, 1969, I was a 22-year-old Marine 2nd lieutenant in flight school, a year from going to Southeast Asia. I had graduated from the United States Naval Academy a year earlier in 1968, a year of tremendous social upheaval with the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bobby Kennedy. There were riots across the country, including here in Washington and at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The nation appeared to be coming unhinged.

I remember that in the midst of the horror and unrest, 1968 ended on a hopeful note, when Apollo 8 orbited the moon and, on Christmas Eve, read the first 10 verses from the book of Genesis. The Apollo 8 astronauts also took the legendary Earthrise photo. That flight did more to unite the country and world than any other event that year.

The Apollo 8 mission helped set stage for Apollo 11 six months later. Forty years ago today, I remember watching the moon landing from the Bachelor Officer Quarters at Naval Air Station Meridian, Mississippi. It was Sunday. A group of us had just returned from a weekend of revelry in New Orleans and we gathered to watch this historic event.

As was the case with most Americans and other people from around the world, it inspired me to explore, and although I never dreamed of becoming an astronaut at that

time, I set off on a course that eventually would bring me here today.

Four decades after the Apollo 11 landing, it is clear Apollo's legacy goes far beyond the moon rocks we brought back from the lunar surface.

Besides inspiring me, Apollo inspired a generation of Americans – and other young people around the world – to study mathematics and science and pursue careers in aerospace-related fields. Young people helped build Apollo and you would be hard-pressed to find an engineer at NASA old enough to remember the Apollo landings who doesn't put it near the top of the reasons he or she came to work here. One of our challenges at NASA today is to

inspire this generation of young people the way Apollo inspired us.

Other impacts of Apollo are even more profound. In some ways, Apollo fundamentally changed how humankind views its place in the universe. The Apollo 8 Earthrise picture was called by one prominent photographer the most influential environmental photo ever taken. Former Vice President Al Gore said: "That one picture exploded in the consciousness of humans . . . Within 18 months of this picture the environmental movement had begun." The image showed Earth, according to the Apollo 8 crew, "like a Christmas tree ornament lit up in space, fragile-looking" against the blackness of the cosmos and the desolation of the moon.

Later Apollo crews also remarked on the fragile beauty of our planet from space, and all of the missions captured other stunning images, such as the Apollo 17 full Earth photo. In a sense, by traveling hundreds of thousands of miles to visit the moon, we discovered our home planet, Earth.

Having flown in space four times, I can tell you from personal experience that seeing Earth from the vantage point of space truly changes your perspective. Aboard the space shuttle, I saw the beauty of war-torn parts of our planet appearing peaceful and serene without borders or boundaries. I also saw the majestic Amazon rain forest devastated by deforestation. My dream is that one day any American will be able to launch into space and see the magnificence of our home planet as I have been blessed to

do. And when that day comes, it will have been the Apollo astronauts who blazed the trail.

On behalf of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, I would like to again thank the Apollo astronauts for their bravery, dedication and historic accomplishments. What you achieved never will be forgotten. Centuries from now, future generations will remember it was you who took humankind's first steps beyond our planet. We salute you for all you have done for America – and the world.

Thank you.