

**REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR BOLDEN
ANNUAL MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BUSINESS AND
PROFESSIONAL BREAKFAST**

Charleston, S.C.

Jan. 18, 2011

Thank you, Mayor Riley, for inviting me to Charleston and thank you for your years of leadership rebuilding Charleston and helping heal racial divides and making Charleston a national model in so many ways. Your leadership is recognized across the nation, and I know that President Obama recognized you last year with the National Medal of the Arts. We applaud you for all that you do.

I'm especially pleased to return to Charleston, my mother's birthplace and one of the most beautiful and historic cities in the South. In the past, my wife, Jackie, and I have spent New Years here as participants in the storied Renaissance Weekends, and it was here in Charleston on the night of the assassination of the late President John Fitzgerald Kennedy that I came off the bench as my father's backup quarterback for the C.A. Johnson "Green Hornets" to lead my team to victory over the Lower State Champion Burke High School football team in the South Carolina State Championship in the

days of segregated schools. I am excited to learn that under Mayor Riley's leadership, the City of Charleston is really pursuing excellence in many areas, so I applaud you all for that and I'm glad to be here to see it firsthand.

I speak to a lot of business and professional groups, but it's wonderful to be back in my home state as we honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a man whose contributions to a more peaceful and just world will never be forgotten.

Before I start, I want to take a moment to address the attack on our public servants -- truly an attack on our nation -- that happened in Tucson. As we know, Dr. King always advocated for non-violent solutions, even though he was ultimately to die tragically. I want to recognize the courageous fight that Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords is going through right now and affirm again what an honorable and even-handed public servant she has always been. The prayers of the entire NASA Family are with her, her husband, astronaut Mark Kelly, her brother in law, astronaut Scott Kelly, and all the victims of this senseless tragedy. I spoke to Mark last week, and his strength is a blessing in this terrible situation. Our celebration of Dr.

King's life must acknowledge how much work there is still to do in our world, but also how much inspiration we draw from his example. Please observe with me a brief moment of silence for all who are today scarred by violence.

I wasn't even a teenager when Dr. King started on his quest for justice and equality with the Montgomery Bus Boycott. But by the time I was a young man, his work on our national stage had reached people all over the world. Including a young man in Columbia, South Carolina, Charles Bolden, Jr., who was trying to live up to his parents' high expectations.

My parents were career educators so I was truly blessed in that regard. Through them, a passion for learning and high expectations for pursuing my education were made integral to my growing up. I had examples of right living directly in front of me, with which not everyone is blessed. I had Dr. King's principles right before me at the dinner table.

Many of the values I have brought to my professional life, I got from my parents...being bold, being fearless, and not allowing what other people think or say deter me from doing what is right. They taught me not to just

sit on the sideline of life, but to strive to turn my passion and dreams into reality. My parents were adherents of the tenets of Dr. King.

I wasn't called upon to be as brave as the Little Rock Nine or the other kids who walked up the steps past screaming crowds just to go to school, but in my personal life, I took strength from Reverend King's work. I also learned the value of public service through my parents. That commitment to public service led me to join the military – I attended the U.S. Naval Academy and enjoyed a 34-year career in the U.S. Marine Corps.

When Dr. King was preaching his non-violent protest, I was diligently working to get into the Naval Academy. That's not really such a paradox. I wanted to serve my country as my father and my uncles had done in World War II when Blacks had to fight for the right to serve in our Armed Forces. I wanted to follow in the footsteps of so many African Americans who had already served this country with distinction, if not always with recognition.

For me, it was an uphill battle. No one in my South Carolina congressional delegation would provide an appointment nor nomination to the Academy as was required for admission. I wrote President Johnson asking for help,

and that's when Congressman William Dawson of Illinois provided me the appointment I needed to be accepted. Rep. Dawson was himself a veteran of World War I, and only the third African American elected to Congress in the 20th century. He was the only serving Black member during his first term.

Things have changed. I have the honor today of being the first African American administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Serving under the nation's first Black president. Believe me, when I grew up, either one of those things would have been unimaginable as I sat in Columbia's Carver Theater, the only movie house in my town for Black people.

When I speak to young people today -- the ones who I hope will take the gains that previous generations have made and make their own progress; when I speak to them, I tell them, don't waste your time trying to explain yourself, your identity, to anyone or justify why you are where you are, in the workplace or anywhere else. Do your job and do it very well. Live your life according to the Golden Rule and the strong principles taught by Dr. King. Always remind yourself of 'why' you are pursuing the things you do

and stay in touch with that answer, and don't let others define it for you.

This is especially true in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines that we so urgently need young people to pursue.

The fields are tough, no doubt about it. But at NASA we're doing all we can to inspire young people to become the exploration leaders of tomorrow.

On March 7, 1965 on a bridge entering Selma, Alabama, 600 civil rights marchers were attacked and brutally beaten simply because they were marching for their own basic human rights. At the head of that march across the Edmund-Pettus Bridge was John Lewis, today a member of the Georgia Congressional Delegation. Eight days after the attack, President Lyndon B. Johnson came before a joint session of Congress to propose the historic Voting Rights Act.

Today, Congressman Lewis likes to say that on the end of the bridge, opposite from the police who attacked the marchers, is President Barack Obama. I understand his view, but I have another. I believe on the other end of that bridge are the students in the Charleston schools today -- that group of young people for whom today there is a new world. Today's generation that will have the chance – if not the right – to take the hard-won

advantages they have inherited from the generations of their parents and grandparents and build upon them. Embodied in them are the hopes and dreams and aspirations of a truly united America. It is only as one nation that we will be able to face and conquer the challenges not only that science and technology have in store for us, but also that our own human failings provide, sometimes on a daily basis – a chance to change and improve. And it is our diversity from which true innovation, creativity and progress will ensue.

It's a new world all around. What I preside over at NASA would have been science fiction when I was growing up. The International Space Station, an orbiting outpost the size of a football field, circling overhead 250 miles above Earth, with human occupants 24/7 for more than ten years now would have been unthinkable in my college days. In fact, the international partnership that built and operates the ISS would itself have been unthinkable even very recently. That we have a regular presence at Saturn and Mars and will soon have a satellite orbiting Mercury was something we could only conceptualize when I studied at the U.S. Naval Academy.

And of course, this year we are also wrapping up 30 years of flying the space shuttle. In addition to the numerous scientific and technological breakthroughs it has made possible, it has also been instrumental in providing space flight opportunities for women and people of color, effectively breaking down that segregation without a single law being passed to force it. Nearly 400 people have flown on the shuttle with distinction and honor. Crews have made the ultimate sacrifice. And flight managers and ground teams have shown an extraordinary dedication to this program that has inspired the world. It was my great privilege to fly four times on the shuttle.

So I certainly owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. King. And tonight when I speak in my home town of Columbia, and as I continue to speak to Historically Black Colleges and Universities and many other groups, I'll strive to show by example how grateful, how proud I am to have the opportunities he helped to make possible.

I'll leave you with the words of the Rev. Dr. Benjamin E. Mays, Dr. King's mentor during his years of study at Morehouse College. It is Dr. Mays who perhaps influenced Dr. King most, and whose words and thoughts we

frequently heard reflected in the words of Dr. King. This is from a sermon by Dr. Mays titled "What Man Lives By".

"Man must believe that however hard the road, however difficult today, tomorrow things will be better. Tomorrow may not be better, but we must believe that it will be. Wars may never cease, but we must continue to strive to eliminate them. We may not abolish poverty, but we must believe that we can provide bread enough to spare for every living creature and that we can find the means to distribute it. We may not exterminate racism, but we must believe that different racial groups can live together in peace, and we must never cease to try to build a society in which the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man become realities."

Dr. King helped us answer that question 'why.' His actions arose from a belief, a moral compass – a conviction that there were higher principles that we could and should follow. I've had the privilege of viewing our planet from above, where its serenity and lack of political borders belies the truth of what sometimes happens on the ground. I hope more people will have that chance in the future. It could only increase understanding and bring about a realization of how much we are all in this together.

Until that day happens, those of us earthbound have Dr. King to look to as a guidepost on our way. Long before I took flight in aircraft and spacecraft, his principles were freely given to me. I carried them with me to war, to space, and now in my daily life in the decisions I make as a leader, as a father and husband, as a citizen.

Thank you. May you all have a blessed and reflective day.