

REMARKS FOR ADMINISTRATOR BOLDEN

ALAN SHEPARD SYMPOSIUM

May 5, 2011

Thank you, Hugh (Harris), and thank you, everyone, for coming today.

Laura, Julie, Alice – thanks for helping us put a human face on an iconic man. And, Scott, you are a legend. Thank you for all of your contributions to our nation. Jay, you've been instrumental in chronicling the exploits of the space program for millions of people, and we appreciate your extraordinary dedication.

It's my pleasure to be here today, not only to recognize a courageous flight, and a historic moment, but also to challenge all of us to remember just what Alan Shepard's achievement, and that of the whole Mercury Program, meant for this country and continues to mean as we strive forever-greater heights in human exploration.

The Mercury Program gave our country something new – an astronaut corps and space vehicles that began our human exploration efforts. Those efforts have now culminated in an orbiting International Space Station that

has been occupied by humans 24/7 for more than 10 years and will be for at least 10 more. We've launched an amazing, re-useable space vehicle more than 130 times and achieved amazing things with it. That space shuttle has deployed and retrieved satellites, united the international communications grid, uncovered new scientific knowledge and increased our understanding of robotics, built the station and sent hundreds of diverse men and women to the stars.

With the same spirit of innovation and grit of the Mercury, Gemini and Apollo Programs, we now move out on an exciting path forward where we will develop the capabilities to take humans to even more destinations in the solar system. Where commercial companies will expand access to that rarefied area where Alan first trod for America, and NASA can focus on those bigger, harder destinations as well as the science to peer beyond our solar system.

It's an honor to share this day with so many people who helped NASA pioneer human spaceflight and enabled the agency's many accomplishments since that time. I salute all of you. As I piloted the shuttle,

I never doubted that the people on the ground helping me succeed in space were the most dedicated, knowledgeable people in the world.

It's a tough business, this rocket launching. It's never going to be without risk. From Apollo to the Shuttle era, men and women have lost their lives trying to push the boundaries of our experience.

It was a good day, May 5, 1961. But the world waited on pins and needles, praying for that outcome. I like to think Alan was focused on the flight, on his duties as a pilot. He was the consummate professional. None of us can really feel ourselves walking into history, but he had to know it.

I was a teenager at the time and just sorting out the field of study I wanted to pursue. I was proud to follow in Alan's footsteps a few years later and become a test pilot myself.

But he was our first in space, and will forever be an icon. I've spent a very significant portion of my career at NASA, both as an astronaut and in the Astronaut Office and now head of our space program. The experiences I've had would not have been possible without Alan's pioneering efforts. The

inspiration that has created generations of leaders to enlarge our understanding of our universe and to strive toward the highest in human potential, was sparked by the early achievements, beginning with Freedom 7 and a daredevil test pilot who flew the ultimate experimental vehicle that May day 50 years ago. Who walked out onto this very launch pad and perhaps saw the future.

I like to think that if Alan did ponder history as he stepped into the capsule, he could not have imagined the full scope of achievements that would flow from his actions, or the greater accomplishments that are yet to come if we continue to follow his example and strive for the things that are hard, but are good and worthwhile. Thank you all for this wonderful celebration.