

Lori Garver, NASA Deputy Administrator

SOFIA Joining Forces Event

Joint Base Andrews

September 22, 2011

Good afternoon. My name is Lori Garver, Deputy Administrator at NASA.

I want to thank our German Aerospace Center partners and Joint Base Andrews for organizing this event and especially for making it possible for students and the children of military families to see this unique flying observatory up close.

And let me just take a moment to commend First Lady Michelle Obama and Jill Biden for devoting their time and energy in encouraging all Americans to do more in support of the wives, husbands, sons, daughters and other family members of our men and women in uniform who are defending our freedom around the world.

I want to also welcome any and all Members of Congress who are here today.

And a special hello to Mary Blessing, an astronomy teacher at Herndon High School -- one of only six American teachers selected to work with scientists aboard SOFIA and to share that experience with their students.

I know you are all eager to tour this magnificent aircraft, so I am only going to speak briefly then turn it over to my colleagues, Paul Hertz, NASA's Chief Scientist in our Science Mission Directorate; and Leland Melvin, our Associate Administrator for Education and a former astronaut.

Paul and Leland will speak more about the amazing scientific and educational value of SOFIA, but let me just tell you that this project is a key component of NASA's science objectives.

It will help us zoom in close on some of the most fundamental questions of the universe: Where did we come from? How was our solar system formed? And what else is out there?

It is fitting that SOFIA means “wisdom” in Greek.

That’s really the purpose of this magnificent observatory – to expand our wisdom of the universe and of ourselves.

SOFIA is the world’s largest airborne observatory – a highly modified Boeing 747sp fitted with a 100 inch diameter infrared telescope.

It complements the work of NASA’s space-based telescopes like Hubble, Spitzer, and Herschel, as well as major Earth-based telescopes.

The infrared astronomy enable by SOFIA will help us better understand the formation of stars and planets, organic molecules throughout space, the history of our solar system, the evolution of

nearby galaxies and the role of the black hole at the Milky Way's core.

This also represents one of NASA's most important international partnerships. We are proud to be working with the German Aerospace Center on this and other projects, including the work we have done together in human space exploration on the International Space Station.

With the announcement last week that NASA has selected the design for a new heavy-lift space exploration system to take American astronauts farther into space than ever, international partnerships like this will play an even more important role in our future.

As the agency focuses more on deep space exploration, we are transitioning more of the responsibility for the transport of astronauts and cargo to the ISS and other low earth destinations to U.S. Industry this will help reduce our costs so that we can do

more Science like SOFIA and so that we can again explore farther into our Solar System and the Universe.

Finally, let me say again, how pleased I am that NASA is giving students, military families and teachers the opportunity to experience and learn from this amazing technology.

This supports our commitment to inspire even more young people to study math, science and engineering so we can continue America's technological and competitive leadership into the future.

With that...I will turn it over to our Associate Administrator for Education, Leland Melvin...