

KENNEDY CENTER CELEBRATION
50TH ANNIVERSARY OF KENNEDY SPACE
SPEECH TO CONGRESS

May 25, 2011

Thank you, Emil, and thanks to the members of the Space Philharmonic for providing this great evening of music. Welcome to this program that celebrates the wonderful legacy left by President John F. Kennedy 50 years ago today and the amazing accomplishments that have grown from it – a tremendous program of innovation and inspiration for the world.

I was a teenager when President Kennedy delivered his charge to Congress to land a man on the moon and return him safely, but those words sparked my imagination, as they did for millions. We recently completed the construction of the International Space Station and today we stand at the door to closing the incredible 30 year Space Shuttle Era – a great adventure of unprecedented international cooperation in low Earth orbit. The words of President John Kennedy 50 years ago today are at this time so appropriate: “The impact of

this adventure on the minds of men everywhere who are attempting a determination of which road they should take...Now it is time to take longer strides...Time for a great new American enterprise.” And a NEW ERA began.

His inspiring words, calling on us to pursue exploration as a unified nation, and envision the benefits of exploration for Earth, were part of a speech on "Urgent National Needs." Today, we have another young President, Barack Obama, who has outlined an urgent national need to out-innovate, out-educate, and out-build our

competitors and create new capabilities that will take us farther into the solar system and help us learn even more about our place in it.

President Obama not only honors the Kennedy space legacy, but also again challenges the nation with his vision for the NEXT ERA of exploration.

We stand at a moon shot moment once again.

Where we have a chance to make great leaps forward to new destinations, new vehicles, and new ways of exploring. Our advantage now is that we have those 50 years of accomplishment

on which to build. The dreams President Kennedy helped make real for our world, and the dreams we still hold, are just out of reach, but not out of our grasp.

Please join me in saluting the men and women who have helped get us where we are today.

With us tonight are some of the brave astronauts from our earliest days, as well as men and women from our Space Shuttle Program, and Laura Churchly, daughter of Alan Shepard, the first American to travel to space -- just a few weeks before President Kennedy

made his historic speech, thank you for sharing your father with the world!

And I send a special thank you to the Kennedy family for all you have done for this nation and to raise our sights toward our highest potential.

To all of you explorers here tonight, let your imaginations roam, and enjoy! Now I want to introduce you to the founder of Very Special Arts, ambassador to Ireland, author, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom, trustee of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing

Arts, and sister of that great President who set us on this path of exploration. Please join me in welcoming The Honorable Jean Kennedy Smith.