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PRESS CONFERENCE

"Administrator Griffin Visits China"

SPEAKERS:

MICHAEL GRIFFIN, Administrator, NASA
SHANNON LUCID, NASA Astronaut
BILL GERSTENMAIER, Associate Administrator
for Space Operations
CLARK RANDT, JR., U.S. Ambassador to China

[Moderated by Dean Acosta, NASA Press Secretary]

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MR. ACOSTA: I am Dean Acosta. I am the Press
3 Secretary for NASA.

4 I will introduce everybody. We will have short
5 opening remarks, and then we will go around and have you
6 ask your questions. I ask that you identify yourself and
7 who you are affiliated with and who you are asking your
8 question to.

9 Obviously, everybody knows the Ambassador. So I
10 am not going to go and introduce the Ambassador, but I am
11 sure everybody is familiar with Ambassador Randt here.

12 To my left is the NASA Administrator, Dr. Michael
13 Griffin. To his left is NASA Astronaut Shannon Lucid, Dr.
14 Shannon Lucid, flown in space five times, five different
15 missions, and then to her left is the Associate
16 Administrator for Space Operations at NASA, Bill
17 Gerstenmaier.

18 All right. I will turn it now to the
19 Administrator for some opening remarks.

20 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, thanks for being
21 here, everybody. It is a real pleasure for us to be here
22 on the first trip by any NASA Administrator to China for

1 the purposes of exploring and expanding cooperation between
2 our two nations in space.

3 We have had a couple of excellent days to visit,
4 and we are looking forward to Wednesday also in Shanghai to
5 see other facilities that we haven't seen here.
6 Altogether, it has been an excellent trip.

7 MR. ACOSTA: Shannon?

8 DR. LUCID: Thank you very much.

9 I feel very privileged to be here and be part of
10 this historic occasion when we have the opportunity to talk
11 together with the Chinese people that are involved in their
12 space program and with us, and I hope that something
13 happens in the future where we can continue working
14 together.

15 MR. GERSTENMAIER: This is my first trip to
16 China. I appreciate being here and getting a chance to
17 interact with some of the Chinese space officials. It has
18 been very interesting. We have seen many interesting
19 things during our visit here, and it has been a very good
20 trip so far.

21 AMBASSADOR RANDT: It has been an honor to have
22 Dr. Griffin here. This is the first official visit by a

1 NASA Administrator, and it is another indication of the
2 growth in our relationship with China.

3 MR. ACOSTA: I failed to mention that it is our
4 first trip to China, but Dr. Lucid was actually born in
5 Shanghai. So this is a return home, so to speak.

6 All right. Now that we have gone through opening
7 remarks, we will start off. We will just go around the
8 table, and then anybody else once we finish going around
9 the table.

10 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: And then you have got the
11 phone too, the folks on the phone.

12 MR. ACOSTA: Yes. They are listening in at
13 NASA.gov. So it is only the people here who are asking the
14 questions.

15 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Oh, okay.

16 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Well, we will start
17 right here. Go ahead.

18 QUESTIONER: My name is Peter [inaudible]. I am
19 from the Associated Press.

20 I wanted to ask you why are you coming here now.
21 The Chinese have been trying to get previous NASA
22 Administrators to come to China, and they haven't done so.

1 I think there has been some reluctance on the part of this
2 administration and the previous administrations to
3 cooperate with the military-based space program. So what
4 led your decision or the decision of the people who signed
5 off on your trip to do so?

6 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, we are at NASA
7 still unable to cooperate with the military-based space
8 program, but we have had a very enjoyable visit with the
9 civilian side of China's space efforts.

10 The visit was motivated by discussions between
11 Chinese President Hu and U.S. President George Bush in the
12 summit between the two nations earlier this year.
13 President Hu offered, and President Bush accepted on my
14 behalf, the invitation to visit China as the Administrator.

15 I can only say that this represents a step toward
16 lessening the distance between our two countries on these
17 issues.

18 QUESTIONER: Which issues are those?

19 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Whichever issues have
20 kept us apart, primarily the issues of control of missile
21 technologies and nonproliferation.

22 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Right here.

1 QUESTIONER: Dr. Griffin --

2 MR. ACOSTA: Could you please identify yourself?

3 QUESTIONER: I'm sorry. My name is Koshi [ph].
4 I am from [inaudible] magazine in Beijing.

5 Dr. Griffin, during your visit, you met Sun
6 Laiyan yesterday. Can you let us know what topics were
7 covered at that meeting, and do you expect any agreements
8 or advancements in space cooperation between China and the
9 U.S. in the near future? Will there be any
10 inter-government dialogue being established, and when?

11 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I think we have
12 agreed that we will continue inter-government dialogues
13 between CNSA and NASA, at least once a year, and we are
14 going to explore whether it would be a good idea to set up
15 working groups in particular areas such as earth science,
16 climate research, data sharing on various scientific
17 missions, and robotic exploration of several kinds. We
18 believe that might be a productive thing to do, and we are
19 going to explore it. So we did have very useful
20 discussions, and I enjoyed meeting Dr. Sun.

21 QUESTIONER: I would like to know is
22 participating in the ISS.

1 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: There are no plans on our
2 part to work with China on the ISS construction.

3 The ISS program is the International Space
4 Station program. In its present form, it is now
5 approaching 13 years old. The partnerships that led to the
6 development of the ISS are well established. I do not
7 propose to change any of those arrangements at the present
8 time.

9 If China and the United States were to cooperate
10 in the arena of manned space flight, that would be well
11 down the road from where we are starting today, and it
12 would involve projects that for the United States come
13 after the development of the International Space Station.

14 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Over here.

15 QUESTIONER: My name is [inaudible], and I am
16 from [inaudible].

17 Some Chinese [inaudible] or complain that we have
18 difficulties getting visas to the United States, even in
19 attending [inaudible] conference in the United States. How
20 do you think [inaudible]?

21 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, you are looking at
22 me, but I am the NASA Administrator, and I have absolutely

1 no control over or involvement in the granting of visas.
2 So I can't answer your question.

3 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Yes.

4 AMBASSADOR RANDT: It is a question of time. It
5 is not a question of intention or desire. Under
6 regulations, after 9/11, it isn't that less people get
7 visas. This year, we will issue a record number of visas
8 to Chinese citizens to visit the U.S. Over 300,000 will
9 visit the United States this year, including we hope some
10 scientists and some engineers.

11 After 9/11, one of the measures put in place was
12 that under regulations from the Department of Homeland
13 Security required that people in certain fields, we had to
14 refer their applications to Washington and get approval
15 from Washington. When that was new, it took a really long
16 time. Now it takes an average of 18 days, but that is 18
17 extra days in addition to waiting for the interview and all
18 the rest of the standards.

19 So it is usually a matter of time, if you apply
20 on time. People should keep that in mind and apply early
21 and leave 20 to 25 days extra because when we go back to
22 Washington, in fact, 99 percent of them are, in fact,

1 approved, but it is the time it takes. People say they
2 didn't get a visa, which they did eventually, but after the
3 conference provision of applying on time. So it is really
4 an issue of time.

5 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Thank you, Mr.
6 Ambassador. That is helpful.

7 MR. ACOSTA: Next question. We will stay along
8 the table. The gentleman right here.

9 QUESTIONER: My name is [inaudible]. I am with
10 the Beijing.

11 Both U.S. and China [inaudible]. Do you think
12 there was any [inaudible]?

13 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I think it is way
14 too early to say.

15 I think with this visit, the United States is
16 taking the first steps toward helping to establish closer
17 relationships with the space program of China, but, again,
18 collaboration on human missions would be well down the
19 road, and this is only the first step.

20 QUESTIONER: Do you think that [inaudible]?

21 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, it has hardly
22 begun, and we have existing efforts where we do, in fact,

1 work with China in data sharing and climate research, and
2 we have proposed with Administrator Sun to extend those
3 relationships. So I certainly don't think that
4 collaboration has been proceeding at too fast a pace, but
5 we are at the start, rather than at the end. So I think we
6 need to let it evolve.

7 MR. ACOSTA: Let's stay right along the line.

8 QUESTIONER: My name is [inaudible].

9 China has made the proposal during your talk
10 yesterday calling for NASA cooperation and to eliminate
11 obstacles for a bilateral [inaudible]. So I want to know
12 how do you think the United States will respond to the
13 China convention.

14 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, again, there are
15 differences between our nations on certain key points. One
16 of those major points is the control of missile technology,
17 and we have been very firm on that in the past, and I
18 believe we will continue to be firm on the importance of
19 appropriately controlling missile technology.

20 That said, we do desire to have a closer
21 relationship with China, and this is one step forward in
22 that arena. The details of how that collaboration could

1 evolve or will evolve will depend on the actions of both
2 sides.

3 QUESTIONER: And Administrator Sun will visit the
4 United States [inaudible]?

5 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I have no knowledge of
6 the Administrator's plans. Those are his plans, not mine.

7 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Let's come back here.

8 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

9 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: No.

10 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Come back and stay over
11 here on this side.

12 QUESTIONER: I am just wondering. Can you tell
13 us --

14 MR. ACOSTA: Can you please identify yourself?

15 QUESTIONER: Oh, I'm sorry. [Inaudible.]

16 I was wondering if you could tell us specifically
17 parts of the China space program you were particularly
18 impressed with or maybe more advanced and maybe what parts
19 of the space program you felt were backward. Does anything
20 come to mind?

21 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I certainly don't
22 think we found any parts of China's space program to be

1 backward or underdeveloped. China has made clearly
2 enormous strides in a very short period of time in
3 developing its space program.

4 In fact, one of my purposes here was to convey,
5 on behalf of our nation, our congratulations to and
6 appreciation of China's accomplishments in space, being
7 only the third nation to develop its own capability to put
8 people in space. So, on the contrary, we were very
9 impressed with what we saw, bearing in mind that we have
10 seen only a portion of the overall program.

11 I particularly enjoyed the visit to CAST
12 yesterday, seeing the facilities that have been used to
13 develop the Shenzhou spacecraft.

14 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

15 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Sorry. CAST with a "T."

16 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Next question. Let's
17 switch back over here to this side of the room.

18 QUESTIONER: I am with [inaudible]. I wanted to
19 know more about your itinerary. Have you gone to the
20 Beijing [inaudible]? What are your plans?

21 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: We did not go to the
22 Beijing command and control center, and we will not be

1 visiting the launch site. I haven't looked at my itinerary
2 for Wednesday, and so I don't know what we will be seeing
3 in Shanghai. I know we will be visiting the China Academy
4 of Sciences, that branch.

5 QUESTIONER: What did you see?

6 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: We saw -- met with Dr.
7 Yuan of the Chinese Academy of Space Technology and also
8 with Administrator Sun of CNSA.

9 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

10 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: We have not been to the
11 space launch facility.

12 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

13 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, as we said starting
14 out, this is for some of the more senior folks at NASA.
15 This is a get-acquainted visit. This is an exploratory
16 visit. This is a first date, if you will. We are just --
17 just an exploratory visit.

18 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Next question, right
19 over here.

20 QUESTIONER: Hi. I am [inaudible].

21 I have a question about a working group which you
22 talked about. When do you [inaudible]? Do you have any

1 time frame?

2 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I don't have anything to
3 say about that. We still need to establish whether we need
4 to determine whether we can establish such groups.

5 QUESTIONER: So what kind of things do you have
6 to consider before you establish any?

7 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I don't want to go into
8 any of that.

9 MR. ACOSTA: Okay. Next question. Somebody that
10 wants to ask a question that hasn't had an opportunity?
11 All right. Back in the corner.

12 QUESTIONER: I am [inaudible] with CNN.

13 [Inaudible.] I am wondering if any of those
14 [inaudible].

15 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Hardly so. We welcome
16 China to the fraternity of space-faring nations.

17 I have had occasion to say in the past that there
18 are. Of course, between countries and cultures, there are
19 always things which divide us and set us apart and things
20 which bring us together, and the exploration of space is
21 one of those things that, above almost anything else, all
22 people of the world share an interest in and are excited

1 by. People all over the world are excited by pictures from
2 the Hubble Space Telescope and by news of the construction
3 of the International Space Station.

4 So collaboration in space, cooperation in space
5 is one of those things that I think we can look forward to
6 being a unifying force. Very pleased with that.

7 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Next question. Anybody?
8 There you go.

9 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

10 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I don't have the least
11 bit of confidence to discuss that subject and won't.

12 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

13 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Again, this is my first
14 visit to China. I have not had the opportunity to study
15 those things. I have nothing to say.

16 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Next question over here.

17 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: This is Voice of America.

18 You talked a bit about your itinerary, but do you
19 have the sense that you are seeing what you need to see in
20 order to go back and give a proper assessment of the
21 program here? Have you had the access that you wanted to
22 have?

1 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: We have had a very nice
2 first visit, and I don't think any of us are under the
3 illusion that we are going to see the entire set of
4 facilities in the Chinese space program on one initial
5 visit of a few days.

6 It has been very productive, enjoyed meeting the
7 people that we have met, but, again, this is the first
8 step.

9 MR. ACOSTA: Next question. Anybody that hasn't
10 had a chance to ask a question? All right. Let's go back
11 over here.

12 QUESTIONER: In May 2006, you visited India and
13 signed an agreement with the Indian government. So they
14 are going to [inaudible] equipment from their lunar, first
15 lunar mission, and the U.S. has always been working closely
16 with Japan. So now you come to China. I am wondering what
17 NASA plans to do in balancing the relationships among
18 countries [inaudible].

19 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: It is not our goal to
20 balance the relationship. It is our goal to have
21 productive relationships with as many countries as are
22 willing and interested in having productive relationships

1 with us.

2 The United States very frequently flies
3 scientific instruments, winners of particular competitions
4 on board international spacecraft, and we very frequently
5 -- I am tempted to say the majority of the time -- we
6 accommodate internationally developed scientific
7 instruments on our missions. So that cooperation goes both
8 ways, and we do look forward to extending those
9 possibilities to Chinese space missions.

10 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Next question. Any
11 questions for Shannon or Bill or the Ambassador?

12 [No response.]

13 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Any more questions?
14 This is your time.

15 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

16 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, one of the values
17 of international cooperation in space that I think we found
18 over the years is that -- first of all, the problems of
19 space flight, whether human or robotic, are very difficult.
20 They are right at the edge of what is technically
21 possible, and, indeed, when nations become able to conduct
22 space flight activities, they do so, but it is a symbol of

1 very significant technological prowess in any nation that
2 can do such things.

3 Now, the problems are very difficult, and one of
4 the things that we derive from international cooperative
5 activities is seeing how different nations and different
6 cultures solve those problems. We learn things; they learn
7 things.

8 There is an American joke which you might not
9 get, but this is rocket science, and it is very demanding,
10 and we enjoy the opportunity to examine how other nations
11 and cultures solve the common problems that we all share in
12 developing the art and science of space flight.

13 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

14 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: We have seen some very
15 nice things. If I start going into detail, your eyes are
16 going to roll back in your head because it will be too
17 geeky. So I will just stay away from all that.

18 [Laughter.]

19 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: For example, we saw a
20 very nice algorithm today by which Chinese weather
21 satellite developers correct for the apparent motion of the
22 earth as a result of minor shifts in the orbit of

1 geostationary spacecraft.

2 I'll bet you enjoyed that, didn't you?

3 [Laughter.]

4 MR. ACOSTA: There's your quote. I can see the
5 lead now.

6 All right. Any other questions? We will come
7 back to ABC.

8 QUESTIONER: I have another question for Shannon.

9 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Thank God.

10 [Laughter.]

11 QUESTIONER: I wonder if in your discussions with
12 the Chinese you found [inaudible] particularly looking for
13 feedback for Shuttle development [inaudible] doing training
14 [inaudible], and I am wondering, your experience in space,
15 if you could help solve [inaudible] that is going on or
16 whether the Great Wall can be seen from space.

17 [Laughter.]

18 DR. LUCID: No. We did not discuss any human
19 space flight involvement at all, and so we did not discuss
20 anything about the astronaut program in China versus the
21 astronaut program in the United States.

22 And as to the Great Wall, I am very sorry that I

1 was never able to see the Great Wall of China from space.
2 I looked.

3 [Laughter.]

4 DR. LUCID: But I personally was not able to see
5 that.

6 MR. ACOSTA: There you go. Solved one dilemma.
7 All right. Any other questions? Sure.

8 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

9 MR. ACOSTA: I'm sorry. Can you identify
10 yourself?

11 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

12 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: No. No.

13 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Let me ask one question
14 that came from the Houston Chronicle, Mike, that was sent
15 to me.

16 The question comes from Mark Carreau. It said,
17 "I would be interested in Administrator Griffin's
18 impressions of China's overarching commitment to human
19 space exploration, as well his impressions of the
20 capabilities of the personnel and facilities the NASA
21 entourage has met with or visited so far." You kind of
22 touched upon that, but --

1 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: Well, I have been very
2 impressed with the capabilities and education and
3 experience and intellectual quality of the people that we
4 have met, and the facilities that we have seen have been
5 first rate.

6 I certainly am not in a position to speak for
7 China's commitment to China's manned space program. That
8 would take someone other than me.

9 I can observe that, as I opened up by saying,
10 China has clearly made very great strides in a relatively
11 short period of time, becoming only the third nation to be
12 able to put people into space on their own, and I think
13 that is evidence of a pretty strong commitment so far, but
14 as to what the future holds, I don't think that is for me
15 to say.

16 MR. ACOSTA: All right. Thank you.

17 Any others? Sure? It is your time.

18 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

19 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I doubt it. We have a
20 pretty carefully laid out program for the next few years
21 and a budget associated with it from this President and
22 authorization for that program by the United States

1 Congress. I suspect we will continue on the pace that we
2 have announced, unless we have a problem or something that
3 would cause delays. Those things do happen, but our plan
4 over the next 15 years is to finish the Space Station,
5 retire the Shuttle, develop a replacement set of equipment
6 for the Shuttle, to develop again a heavylift launch
7 vehicle in the class of our old Saturn V to return to the
8 moon to begin the establishment of a research station
9 capability on the moon, and from there to go to Mars. We
10 have laid out that plan over and over again in pretty good
11 detail as we have begun to mature it. I think that is the
12 plan we will stay on.

13 QUESTIONER: [Inaudible.]

14 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: I hope so. We are
15 talking about events 20 years in the future. With any
16 luck, I'll be dead, but I hope to.

17 [Laughter.]

18 MR. ACOSTA: There is your second quote.

19 All right. Any other questions before we wrap
20 up?

21 QUESTIONER: Just one. Are you guys cooperating
22 in any other areas besides [inaudible]?

1 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: There must be, but I'm
2 not familiar with that level of detail. Sorry.

3 MR. ACOSTA: Another question here.

4 QUESTIONER: My question is about NASA's
5 priorities and the U.S. space policy. Some criticize that
6 NASA has been too focused on the manned vehicle plan and
7 making sure people go back to [inaudible], and as a result,
8 some successful unmanned projects are reigned in. What do
9 you say to those?

10 ADMINISTRATOR GRIFFIN: People are assuming cause
11 and effect where it doesn't exist.

12 We have reigned in some of our unmanned or
13 robotic science missions because the overall amount which
14 can be allocated to NASA and to the nation's space program
15 has been reduced, but those reductions have affected all
16 projects.

17 We have reduced the amount of money that we are
18 spending on the Space Station. We have slowed, in fact,
19 rather than increase the pace. We have slowed the pace of
20 development of exploration systems to return to the moon.

21 Almost one-third of NASA's budget is spent on
22 robotic space science. This is an all-time high in terms

1 of its percentage. About \$5.3 billion this year is being
2 spent on robotic space science. That is an all-time high
3 in terms of real dollars.

4 So, for anyone to say that robotic science is
5 being reduced so that we can concentrate on manned space
6 flight just ignores the simple numerical facts.

7 What I think should be brought to people's
8 attention is that our human space flight program had
9 encountered a few years ago and over the years has
10 encountered a significant amount of difficulty. It was
11 brought to a head when we lost Space Shuttle Columbia, and
12 we have needed, frankly, to fix our human space flight
13 program. This administration and this Congress has given
14 us a way forward to do that, and we will fix it, but it
15 requires time and attention. That attention is possibly
16 what you are seeing.

17 The people are confusing the attention that we
18 are bringing to bear to fix our human space flight program
19 with a reduction in science activities, and that is just
20 not appropriate.

21 MR. ACOSTA: All right. That is going to
22 conclude today's press briefing.

1 Do you guys have any final words? Administrator?

2 Mr. Ambassador?

3 All right. Well, that concludes today's press
4 briefing. Thank you very much, and have a great afternoon.

5 [End of press briefing.]

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