

Remarks by the Honorable Sean O'Keefe  
NASA Administrator  
STS-107 Crew Memorial Ceremony  
Arlington National Cemetery  
Arlington, Virginia  
February 2, 2004

Thank you Fred (NASA Deputy Administrator Fred Gregory). Today we remember and commemorate the undaunted courage of seven true heroes for our time, and for all times, our Columbia STS-107 astronauts.

This setting, Arlington National Cemetery, is a special place for many reasons. To be certain it honors the men and women who serve our nation in the uniformed services of the United States, some who have performed extraordinary acts of bravery on the field of battle.

Buried at Arlington are veterans who served the cause of freedom in every conflict from our Revolutionary War to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Arlington National Cemetery also provides a final resting place for great heroes who changed the course of history by blazing new trails of exploration and discovery.

Among those honored at Arlington are such legends of exploration as John Wesley Powell, the first man to explore the

Grand Canyon; Admiral Richard Byrd, the first to fly over both poles; and the discoverers of the North Pole, Robert E. Peary and Matthew Hensen.

Resting here at Arlington is also the President who boldly set our course to the stars, John F. Kennedy.

From the Kennedy gravesite one can gaze across the river towards our citadels of democracy and recall those stirring last words from his inaugural address, "Whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own."

The hallowed ground of Arlington National Cemetery honors many NASA astronauts who took up President Kennedy's call to lead our way into the new frontier of space, including members of the crews of Apollo One, Challenger and Columbia.

Of course, wherever our astronauts are laid to rest is special ground.

Today, the people of a grateful nation add their respects to the seven members of the beloved crew of STS-107. This was made possible by the prompt responsive action of our Congress to

authorize this fitting memorial, led by so many here in attendance today.

I particularly want to thank Jack Metzler, the Superintendent of the Arlington National Cemetery, for the great care and sensitivity his group has demonstrated in developing this remarkable tribute to the Columbia crew.

Through the memorial we dedicate today, visitors to Arlington will learn that these space heroes came from all parts of the United States, from India and Israel.

They were pilots, engineers and scientists, all motivated by a fire within, a passionate eternal flame within each of their souls that compelled them to live lives of distinction, and to bring the heavens ever closer to our grasp.

They bonded as a group while training in the wide-open spaces of Wyoming and came to cherish the view of a globe without borders as they orbited our fragile home in space, the planet Earth.

They delighted in working together to advance important scientific research that will help better all our lives.

They proved that heroes indeed come in all shapes and sizes.

Fitting memorials also come in several shapes and sizes.

Last month President Bush said a living memorial to the Columbia astronauts' legacy will be our new focus and vision for space

exploration that will take human explorers back to the moon and then on to other worlds beyond our own.

Just days after the tragedy, President Bush observed, "Exploration is not an option we choose. It is a desire written in the human heart. We are that part of creation which seeks to understand all creation. We find the best among us, send them forth into unmapped darkness and pray they will return. They go in peace for all mankind, and all mankind is in their debt."

Now the President has given us a renewed commitment to this quest to explore. And as he said just two weeks ago, we do not know where the journey begun by all of our intrepid astronauts will end, yet we know that human beings are headed into the cosmos. Our task will be to pursue this goal with renewed diligence, and in the memory of these heroic souls.

Generations from now, when the reach of human civilization is extended throughout the solar system, people will still come to this place to learn about and pay their respects to our heroic Columbia astronauts. They will look at the astronauts' memorial and then they will turn their gaze to the skies, their hearts filled with gratitude for these seven brave explorers who helped blaze our trail to the stars.

Our thanks to every one here with us today, and those watching from afar, for participating in this heartfelt tribute to the

heroic Space Shuttle Columbia crew members: Colonel Rick Husband, Commander William McCool, Colonel Michael Anderson, Captain David Brown, Dr. Kalpana Chawla, Captain Laurel Clark and Colonel Ilan Ramon.

May God bless the crew of STS-107.