

Oct. 29 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1998

Remarks to the Staff of the Firing Room Prior to the Space Shuttle
Discovery Launch in Cape Canaveral
October 29, 1998

Thank you very much. I have so many things to thank you for today. But among other things, I have to thank you for making the First Lady very happy, because about a year ago she said, "You know, we need to make a list of all the things we want to do before we leave office." I said, "Okay, what's on your list?" She said, "You have to take me to a space launch. I want to go."

We didn't have the courage to come here; we had confidence in you and pride in America and a conviction that our space program is good for the United States and good for the world. And I want to thank you today, because you made all of us terribly proud.

Let me also say that because of the intense interest in this, in the media and among ordinary citizens, the American people have had a unique opportunity today to see what you do, not just at the moment of launch but in the weeks and months and years that precede it,

all the hard work and all the preparation. And now they will learn over the next few days all the things that are being done in space that advance not only our mission in space but the quality of our life here on Earth. And all of that, too, has been made possible.

The last thing I would like to say is, it has been immensely impressive and important to me to have the chance to work with NASA over the last 6 years and see the revolution which has been undertaken, so that now you can, on virtually the same budget you had 6 years ago, do 8 launches a year instead of 2 and continue to explore the outer frontiers of space. I thank you for all of that. America is very, very proud of you today.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:42 p.m. in the Launch Control Center at the John F. Kennedy Space Center.

Remarks to the Staff of the Launch Control Center Following the Space
Shuttle *Discovery* Launch in Cape Canaveral
October 29, 1998

Thank you very much. I want to just add one little factual element to what Dan Goldin said about Hillary wanting to be an astronaut as a little girl. I just told a group up in the control room this. About a year ago we sat down and Hillary said, "You know, we're just going to be here 3 more years, and we need to make a list of every place we'd like to go and everything we'd like to do before we leave office." I said, "Okay, what's the first thing on your list?" She said, "I want to go to Cape Canaveral and see a launch." [Laughter]

I want to thank Dan Goldin and Roy Bridges, the Director of the Kennedy Space Center, all of you who work here. I want to thank Bob Cabana and Eileen Collins, two astronauts who accompanied us today, along with my Science Adviser, Dr. Neal Lane. I want to thank this

crew. And I'd like, with all the press here, one more time to call their names: Commander Brown; Pilot Steve Lindsey; Mission Specialists Stephen Robinson and Scott Parazynski; the two international astronauts, Dr. Mukai of Japan and Mr. Duque of the European Space Agency, the first Spanish citizen ever to fly in space.

I want to thank all of you who work on this, not just in that moment we all see on television or, in this case, we all saw from the rooftop, and we felt the ceiling rumble beneath our feet—[laughter]—because I know there are hours and weeks and months and years behind all this. I want to thank you. And of course I want to thank John Glenn, my good friend and a genuine American hero.

You know, a few days ago, I was in the White House working on something entirely different, and the phone rang and they said—no, no, no,

that's not true—I was down at the Wye Plantation working on the Middle East peace talks. And we hadn't had a lot of sleep since then—[laughter]—but that's where I was. And one of my staff members came up and said, "John Glenn wants to talk to you." I thought, "Oh my goodness, something happened. He said he can't go."

We had a break, so I went and took the phone call. John said, "Mr. President." I said, "John," I said, "what's up?" He said, "I just called to make sure you're not going to chicken out on me. I want you down there when I go up." True story. [Laughter] He said, "I want you down there when I go up." So I said that wild horses couldn't keep Hillary or me away, and we would be there. And we just left Annie and John's family and the other family members of the crew, thanking them.

Let me say to all of you, I feel profoundly indebted to all of you who work at NASA because I know the changes through which this agency has gone in the last 5 years, I know the challenges this agency has faced, I know how, more than any other agency in Government, I believe you have embodied the ideal of the reinventing Government mission of our administration that the Vice President has headed. You have truly done more with less. We're now sending eight missions up a year as opposed to two before. We are doing it in much less time at much lower cost, all thanks to you. And I am profoundly grateful.

I also want to thank you for the next big mission and the opening of the next new chapter in our history in space when the international space station begins to go up, first in Kazakhstan and then here, in the first two installments.

And the last thing I'd like to say is, this mission is going to give America a chance to see what you do through new eyes, not only to experience the adventure, the spirit, but to understand the extent to which what we find out up there helps us live better lives down here. It has broadened the frontiers of medical research. It has helped us to understand how to cope with all kinds of physical conditions that otherwise were not manageable. It has helped us to learn about environmental trends and how to deal with them. It has helped us to see our future on Earth.

And these experiments in aging, which I'm getting more interested in with every passing

day—[laughter]—in what happens to muscle and bone under the stress of space and in conditions of weightlessness; the sleeping disorder test, which I'd very much like to be a part of since I have suffered from one chronically for the last 30 years or so. [Laughter] This is very important. And the American people will now know this about what you do.

So I just want to say to all of you, I hope that the labors that you've made the last 5 years, culminating in the stunning excitement of this day, but also including the marvelous discoveries of the Hubble telescope, the breathtaking action of *Sojourner* on the *Mars Pathfinder* mission, all the other things that have been done, I hope that it will all crystallize here in your 40th anniversary year with this mission, with the intense public attention, with the ordinary citizen's interest at an all-time high, so that from now on into the future on every block in every street corner in every community large and small in America, there will be people from all races and all walks of life who will be proud to support as American citizens our space program as an integral part of our march into the 21st century.

Thank you, and God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:13 p.m. in the lobby of the Launch Control Center at the John F. Kennedy Space Center. In his remarks, he referred to Daniel S. Goldin, Administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA); Roy D. Bridges, Director, NASA's John F. Kennedy Space Center; Col. Robert D. Cabana, USMC, former Chief, NASA Astronaut Office; Lt. Col. Eileen M. Collins, USAF, scheduled to be the first female Mission Commander for an upcoming space shuttle *Columbia* mission. The President also referred to the following crew members of the space shuttle *Discovery*: Mission Commander Lt. Col. Curtis L. Brown, Jr., USAF; Mission Pilot Lt. Col. Steven W. Lindsey, USAF; Mission Specialists Stephen K. Robinson, Scott E. Parazynski, M.D., and Pedro Duque, European Space Agency; and Payload Specialists Chiaki Mukai, M.D., National Space Development Agency of Japan, and Senator John Glenn, who returned to space after 36 years.