



News release

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Elected officials and JFK's podium take center stage at NASA celebration

BAY AREA HOUSTON, TEXAS – There is a sizeable segment of the United States' population that has never known a time without NASA. If it's up to U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, U.S. Rep. Nick Lampson, U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, and Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia, none of us ever will.

On Wednesday, Oct. 8, these elected officials joined Dr. Ellen Ochoa, former astronaut and now deputy director, NASA-Johnson Space Center, along with a few hundred others, in celebrating NASA's 50th anniversary. They gathered mid-morning at a very fitting spot – NASA-JSC's Gilruth Center – named for Bob Gilruth, the Center's first director.

The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership hosted the golden celebration. Bob Mitchell, BAHEP president, opened the ceremony. In speaking of NASA, he said, "We are very fortunate to have such a strong economic driver propelling our local economy. The aerospace industry is THE dynamic engine that moves us forward, that connects us with the rest of the world, and that moves us beyond the ties of gravity to the moon and to points beyond. How lucky we have been this last 50 years to have all of this centered in our own backyard!"

Of special significance to the ceremony was the podium used that had been brought to the Gilruth especially for the occasion. President John F. Kennedy, on Sept. 12, 1962, stood behind that same lectern in Rice Stadium at Rice University and committed the nation to put a man on the moon before the end of the decade. It was an historical moment, and NASA has been making its mark on history ever since.

Jackson Lee was the first legislator to speak from the podium. Her remarks included, "We're here today to promote the message of NASA, the purpose of NASA, and the uniqueness of NASA and its family. We've seen the hills and valleys of NASA, but we've also seen the bravery, the intellect and the heart of NASA.

"You can be assured that members of the congressional delegation, with the leadership that is present as well as those who are not present, are going to put on their boxing gloves. When they talk about NASA and its funding, we'll be on the floor of the House and the United States Senate fighting for its survival."

Lampson took his turn at the podium saying in part, "NASA gives us the inspiration to want to do more to make our dreams become real. That journey to the moon inspired young minds to seek a higher

purpose. The youth of America today want a vision, a dream, a challenge. They want their generation's call to greatness, and they're hungry to embrace whatever opportunity that's laid before them."

He spoke about the five-year gap between 2010 when the Space Shuttle is retired and when NASA's Constellation Program begins stating, "We can't afford to put science on hold for any number of years while competing countries energize their own space programs."

Garcia echoed Lampson's sentiments when she said, "You cannot put a value on the research and knowledge that we gain from space exploration. The best part is that you've taught boys and girls to think beyond their boundaries, to dream and to be free. You've helped to make science and math more meaningful."

Garcia recalled that she was first sworn in as Harris County Precinct 2 commissioner at the Johnson Space Center. She said that her seal of office includes a shuttle and added, "I have you in my heart; I have you in my work; I have you in my dreams."

Ochoa noted that thinking back on NASA's first 50 years was very personal for her, since she was born the same year as NASA. She commented, "It's hard to describe what I felt the first time I visited Johnson Space Center when I was interviewed for the astronaut program. I had a definite feeling that I was setting foot on hallowed ground."

Ochoa continued, "Our past 50 years have included many of the greatest feats of humankind. I believe that our next steps will be even greater, but it will take the dedication of everyone here – the employees, elected officials, and community leaders – to ensure the future for our space program. Please join us as we journey to the moon, Mars and beyond."

Hutchison began her speech by complimenting the host of the event saying, "You do a super job of supporting NASA. I don't know what we'd do without the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership. It has really made sure that the NASA issues stay in the forefront of our Congress and our country. Thank you for that."

She then said, "I never want to make a speech where we don't talk about what NASA has given us: weather forecasting, computing, search and rescue technology, robotics, and electronics. Space exploration helped to create the global positioning system and the satellite telecommunications network. It spawned breakthroughs in medical technology that prolong human life."

Hutchison then spoke of America's dependency on technology. She commented, "That's where we have excelled throughout time. Economic studies show that 85% of the measured growth in per capita income is due to technological change. NASA has been so much an important part of giving America that edge. But right now, China and India are rising powers. The Chinese are accelerating their investment in space technology."

"In America and in Texas, we don't know the meaning of second best. So, America needs to step up to the plate to reinvent our commitment to NASA and to STEM education – science, technology, engineering and math. We are starting to see the negative consequences of our neglect in these fields. Within a few years, 90% of all the world's engineers will live in Asia."

"First, though, we must fully fund NASA. If fully funded, it would help to close the gap from NASA's retirement of the shuttle in 2010 and its replacement which was originally scheduled for 2015. Our national security depends on the ability to shorten the gap."

Hutchison explained that throughout history, space research and national security have had a strong relationship. She concluded by stating, "We cannot allow other countries to acquire new weapons technologies with which America can't keep up. We know that America can meet this challenge just as it did 50 years ago. You have done your part. Now we must make sure that the next generation is just as good as you are so that we will make America in the next 50 years the leader in science and engineering, so that we will keep on the leading edge in national security, technology and scientific research. That is the mission of NASA, and it is a mission that we will fulfill."

Mitchell closed the celebration by telling the elected officials who spoke, "NASA couldn't be NASA without you, and I believe that everyone here is very thankful to have all of you on our side."



U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison and Bob Mitchell, president, Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership, pose for photographers following the NASA 50th celebration held Oct. 8 at NASA's Gilruth Center. BAHEP hosted the event on behalf of Sen. Hutchison.



U.S. Rep. Nick Lampson and Harris County Precinct 2 Commissioner Sylvia R. Garcia are shown during the morning reception held prior to the NASA 50th celebration on Oct. 8.



U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee speaks in support of NASA during a celebration in honor of the organization's 50th anniversary held Oct. 8 at NASA's Gilruth Center. She is standing at the podium used by President John F. Kennedy during the famous speech he gave on Sept. 12, 1962, at Rice University where he committed America to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade.



Dr. Ellen Ochoa, former astronaut and now deputy director of NASA-Johnson Space Center, shared with the audience during a celebration of NASA's 50th birthday that she and NASA were born in the same year. She offered the invitation to "Please join us as we journey to the moon, Mars, and beyond.

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