

## STS-135 Crew Return Ceremony

Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison

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I speak for all Americans when I say we are deeply proud of our astronauts and watched with pride the takeoff and perfect landing of Atlantis. I also want to thank the crew of Atlantis for leaving the flag on the Space Station – that flag that was flown on the very first space shuttle mission over thirty years ago. You left it on the Space Station to reside until an American crew returns to space from American soil and only then will that flag return to Earth, and begin its next mission. It is the symbol of our will to fly again – to lead again.

Today we honor the vision, courage and accomplishments of all of the men and women of the NASA space family, astronauts, engineers, flight directors, trainers, support personnel, maintenance and assembly workers, and their families, so many of whom are here this afternoon. And we thank all of you – for nearly two generations of excellence in the advancement of science and technology.

Here at the Johnson Space Center we have the heart and soul of U.S. human space flight. It was here that it started – with President Kennedy’s vision – at Rice University.

“There is no strife, no prejudice, no national conflict in outer space as yet. Its hazards are hostile to us all. Its conquest deserves the best of all mankind, and its opportunity for peaceful cooperation may never come again. But why, say some, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain. Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas?...We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard...because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win...”

One of my priorities in the new NASA law was to make this last flight happen – it was a stand-by flight not required before the Authorization bill passed last year. My purpose was to assure the Space Station was fully equipped – and our experienced work force would remain available for transition to design and build the next crew carrying ship and make it the best!

And all of you performed flawlessly.

As the Atlantis was orbiting for the last week – the news was filled with stories and articles remembering the past...and questioning the future.

The overwhelming sentiment expressed was – we will go forward...we will close the gap...we will push and push – until we see that flag come back with a plan for its next mission!

Why?

It's still hard...but now – because we have seen the accomplishment from past space discoveries...and we know there is so much more. Because it is the spirit that built America that will respect the past but never rely on it; it is the spirit that must conquer the hardest obstacles...and because this is another year that Rice plays Texas!

I wish everyone could have been with me at Mission Control a few weeks ago where about 60 scientists were monitoring the cosmic ray hits on the new spectrometer that was put on the Space Station in May. Dr. Sam Ting – the Nobel Laureate in physics who built it radiated enthusiasm for the potential to learn the basics of how the universe was formed – he and those other scientists see what I cannot.

My job is to assure they have the opportunity to turn their research into something I can see...and know that it will make a difference in the lives of future Americans and throughout the world.

In the Senate, I'm fighting to make America's Space Program strong – because I know its importance for America's future. But it is your

creativity – your drive and your performance every day that produces the miracles.

Thank you for succeeding.