

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

July 20, 1989

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT
AT 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF
APOLLO MOON LANDING

The Steps of the Air and Space Museum
Washington, D.C.

10:30 A.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very, very much. And thank you, Mr. Vice President, for your introduction and for your introduction and for undertaking to head the National Space Council and for -- already for demonstrating your skill for leadership there.

And thanks to all of you, who have braved the weather to join us today. Behind me stands one of the most visited places on Earth -- a symbol of American courage and ingenuity. And before me stand those on whose shoulders this legacy was built -- the men and women of the United States astronaut corps.

And we are very proud to be part of this unprecedented gathering of America's space veterans -- and to share this stage with three of the greatest heroes of this or any other century -- the crew of Apollo 11.

It's hard to believe that 20 years have passed. Neil and Buzz, who originated the moonwalk 15 years before Michael Jackson ever even thought of it. (Laughter.)

And Michael Collins -- former director of this amazing museum -- and the brave pilot who flew alone on the dark side of the Moon, while Neil and Buzz touched down. Mike, you must be the only American over age 10 that night who didn't get to see the Moon landing. (Laughter.)

And later this evening, after the crowd disperses and the sun goes down, a nearly full Moon will rise out of the darkness and shine down on an America that is prosperous and at peace. And for those old enough to remember that historic night 20 years ago -- step outside tonight with your children or your grandchildren. Lift your eyes skyward, and tell them of the flag -- the American flag -- that still flies proudly in the ancient lunar soil.

And for those who were not yet born, or then too young to recall -- you who are the children of the new century -- raise your eyes to the heavens and join us in a great dream -- an American dream -- a dream without end.

Project Apollo. The first men on the Moon. Some called it quixotic, impossible -- had never been done. But America dreamed it. And America did it. And it began on July 16th, 1969. The sun rose a second time that morning as the awesome fireball of the Saturn Five lifted these three pioneers beyond the clouds. A crowd of one million -- including half of the United States Congress -- held its breath as the Earth shook beneath their feet -- and our view of the heavens was changed forevermore.

Three days and three nights they journeyed. It was a perilous, unprecedented, breathtaking voyage. And each of us remember the night.

Barbara and our daughter Dorothy were with me in our red

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brick house right here on the outskirts of Washington, where we moved up here to represent Houston in the United States Congress. Our 12-year-old kid, Marvin, was on a trip out West with family friends and remembers stopping at a roadside motel to watch. Second boy, Jeb, 16 that summer, teaching English and listening by radio in a small Mexican village, where electricity had yet to arrive.

The landing itself was harrowing. Alarms flashed -- and a computer overload threatened to halt the mission while Eagle dangled thousands of feet above the Moon. Armstrong seized manual control to avoid a huge crater strewn with boulders. With new alarms signalling a loss of fuel -- and the view now blocked by lunar dust -- Mission Control began the countdown for a mandatory abort.

America -- indeed the whole world -- listened -- a lump in our throat and a prayer on our lips. And only 20 seconds of fuel remained. And then out of the static came the words: "Houston. Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed."

Within one lifetime, the human race had traveled from the dunes of Kitty Hawk to the dust of another world. Apollo is a monument to our nation's unparalleled ability to respond swiftly and successfully to a clearly stated challenge -- and to America's willingness to take great risks for great rewards.

We had a challenge. We set a goal. And we achieved it.

So today is not only an occasion to thank these astronauts and their colleagues -- the thousands of talented men and women across the country whose commitment, creativity, and courage brought this dream to life. It's also a time to thank the American people for their faith -- because Apollo's success was made possible by the drive and daring of an entire nation committed to a dream.

In the building behind me are the testaments to Apollo and to what came before -- the chariots of fire flown by Armstrong, Yeager, Lindbergh, and the Wrights. And in the National Archives -- across the great expanse of grass -- are preserved the founding documents of the idea that made it all possible -- the world's greatest experiment in freedom and diversity.

And here -- standing between these twin legacies -- is a fitting place to look forward to the future.

Because the Apollo astronauts left more than flags and footprints on the Moon. They also left some unfinished business. For even 20 years ago, we recognized that America's ultimate goal was not simply to go there and go back -- but to go there and go on.

Mike Collins said it best: "The Moon is not a destination -- it's a direction."

And space is the inescapable challenge to all the advanced nations of the Earth. And there's little question that, in the 21st century, humans will again leave their home planet for voyages of discovery and exploration. What was once improbable is now inevitable.

The time has come to look beyond brief encounters. We must commit ourselves anew to a sustained program of manned exploration of the solar system -- and yes -- the permanent settlement of space. We must commit ourselves to a future where Americans and citizens of all nations will live and work in space.

And today, yes, we are, the U.S. is the richest nation on Earth -- with the most powerful economy in the world. And our goal is nothing less than to establish the United States as the preeminent spacefaring nation.

From the voyages of Columbus -- to the Oregon Trail -- to

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the journey to the Moon itself -- history proves that we have never lost by pressing the limits of our frontiers.

Indeed, earlier this month, one news magazine reported that Apollo paid down-to-earth dividends -- declaring that man's conquest of the Moon "would have been a bargain at twice the price." And they called Apollo "the best return on investment since Leonardo da Vinci bought himself a sketch pad." (Laughter.)

In 1961, it took a crisis -- the space race -- to speed things up. Today we don't have a crisis. We have an opportunity.

To seize this opportunity, I'm not proposing a 10-year plan like Apollo. I'm proposing a long-range, continuing commitment.

First, for the coming decade -- for the 1990's -- Space Station Freedom -- our critical next step in all our space endeavors.

And next -- for the new century -- back to the Moon. Back to the future. And this time, back to stay. (Applause.)

And then -- a journey into tomorrow -- a journey to another planet -- a manned mission to Mars. (Applause.)

Each mission should -- and will lay the groundwork for the next. And the pathway to the stars begins, as it did 20 years ago, with you -- the American people. And it continues just up the street there -- to the United States Congress -- where the future of the space station -- and our future as a spacefaring nation -- will be decided.

And yes, we're at a crossroads. Hard decisions must be made now as we prepare to enter the next century.

As William Jennings Bryan said -- just before the last turn of the century: "Destiny is not a matter of chance -- it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for -- it is a thing to be achieved."

And to those who may shirk from the challenges ahead -- or who doubt our chances of success -- let me say this:

To this day, the only footprints on the Moon are American footprints. The only flag on the Moon is an American flag. And the know-how that accomplished these feats is American know-how. What Americans dream -- Americans can do.

And 10 years from now -- on the 30th anniversary of this extraordinary and astonishing flight -- the way to honor the Apollo astronauts is not by calling them back to Washington for another round of tributes. It is to have Space Station Freedom up there, operational, and underway -- a new bridge between the worlds -- (applause) -- and an investment in the growth, prosperity and technological superiority of our nation.

And the space station will also serve as a stepping stone to the most important planet in the solar system -- Planet Earth.

As I said in Europe just a few days ago, environmental destruction knows no borders. A major national and international initiative is needed to seek new solutions for ozone depletion, and global warming, and acid rain. And this initiative -- "Mission to Planet Earth" -- is a critical part of our space program. And it reminds us of what the astronauts remember as the most stirring sight of all. It wasn't the Moon or the stars, as I remember. It was the Earth -- tiny, fragile, precious, blue orb -- rising above the arid desert of Tranquility Base.

The space station is a first and necessary step for sustained manned exploration -- one that we're pleased has been

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endorsed by Senator Glenn, and Neil Armstrong, and so many of the veteran astronauts we honor today. But it's only a first step.

And today I'm asking my right hand man, our able Vice President, Dan Quayle, to lead the National Space Council in determining specifically what's needed for the next round of exploration -- the necessary money, manpower, and material -- the feasibility of international cooperation -- and develop realistic timetables, milestones along the way. The Space Council will report back to me as soon as possible with concrete recommendations to chart a new and continuing course to the Moon and Mars and beyond.

There are many reasons to explore the universe, but 10 very special reasons why America must never stop seeking distant frontiers -- the 10 courageous astronauts who made the ultimate sacrifice to further the cause of space exploration. They have taken their place in the heavens, so that America can take its place in the stars.

Like them, and like Columbus, we dream of distant shores we've not yet seen.

Why the Moon? Why Mars? Because it is humanity's destiny to strive, to seek, to find. And because it is America's destiny to lead.

Six years ago, Pioneer 10 sailed beyond the orbits of Neptune and of Pluto -- the first man-made object to leave the solar system. Its destination unknown. It's now journeyed through the tenures of five Presidents -- four billion miles from Earth.

In the decades ahead, we will follow the path of Pioneer 10. We will travel to neighboring stars, to new worlds, to discover the unknown. And it will not happen in my lifetime, and probably not during the lives of my children, but a dream to be realized by future generations must begin with this generation. We cannot take the next giant leap for mankind tomorrow unless we take a single step today. (Applause.)

To all of you here, our able director of NASA and others who've served so well -- to all of you here -- and especially the astronauts -- we wish you good luck in your quests, wherever that may take you. Godspeed to you, one and all. And God bless the United States of America.

Thank you all very, very much. (Applause.)

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10:46 A.M. EDT