

eyes of the world then focused in on Cape Canaveral, when a young marine, one of the original seven American astronauts, named John Glenn, climbed into that capsule knowing that the Atlas rocket had a 20-percent chance of failure. He rode it into the heavens for only three orbits. There was an indication on the instrument panel that his heat shield was loose, and as he started the deorbit burn, John Glenn knew that if that was an accurate reading, on reentry into the Earth's fiery atmosphere, heating up in excess of 3,000 degrees Fahrenheit, he would burn up. It is that memorable time when we heard his last words before he went into the blackout period on radio transmissions: John Glenn humming "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." It is hard to tell that story without getting a lump in my throat.

Of course, what then happened, months before we flew John Glenn, we had a young President who said: We are going to the Moon and back within 9 years. This Nation came together. It focused the political will, it provided the resources, and it did what people did not think could be done.

A generation of young people so inspired by this Nation's space program started pouring into the universities, into math and science and technology and engineering. That generation that was educated in high technology has been the generation that has led us to be the leader in a global marketplace by producing the technology, the innovations, the intellectual capital that has allowed us to continue to be that leader.

So it is with that background that this Senator, who has the privilege of chairing the Space and Science Subcommittee within the Commerce Committee, wants to say: Happy birthday, NASA. We are sending to the House of Representatives tonight this NASA reauthorization bill, which will give the flexibility to the next President, and his designee as the next leader of NASA, the flexibility in a very troubled program that has not had the resources to do all the things that are demanded of it to try to continue to keep America preeminent in space; also to continue to have access to our own International Space Station that we built and paid for; and then to chart out a course for the future exploration of the heavens that will keep us fulfilling our destiny of our character as an American people, which is that by nature we are explorers and adventurers.

We never want to give that up. If we ever do, we will be a second-rate nation. But we would not because we have always had a frontier, a new frontier. In the development of this country, it used to be westward. Now it is upward and it is inward and that is the frontier we want to continue to explore.

So happy birthday, NASA. It is my hope that we will have the House of Representatives take this up on their suspension calendar tomorrow.

I wish to give great credit to the staff who are in the room for the majority and the minority. They all have worked at enormous overload—Chan Lieu and Jeff Bingham. Jeff, despite the fact of having suffered a heart attack earlier this year, and we didn't even let him out of his recuperative bed but that I was on the phone with him getting him to start corralling all these other Senators and House Members so we could get a consensus, so we could come together in an agreement.

The result tonight is the fact that this has been cleared in a 100-member Senate, when Senators are on edge and they are always looking for something to object to, and there is no objection here, as ruled by the Presiding Officer.

My congratulations to all the people, to the staff of the Commerce Committee, and to the staff of the Science and Technology Committee in the House of Representatives, chaired by Congressman BART GORDON of Tennessee. I am very grateful for everybody coming together and making this happen.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I am delighted to join my subcommittee chairman, Senator BILL NELSON, in bringing this legislation to the floor for consideration and passage. I share his belief that this legislation is an important statement of overwhelming congressional intent regarding the future of our Nation's civil space programs.

This statement, in the form of legislation we expect to have the near-unanimous support of the Congress, comes at a crucial time for NASA and its important programs. Not only do we, as authorizing committee members, believe it is our responsibility to regularly and consistently offer legislation to authorize appropriations levels, but also to provide a policy framework and guidance for the effective and efficient use of those appropriations. The passage of this bill will represent the first time in over 20 years that NASA authorization bills will have been adopted back-to-back by the Congress.

This week we celebrated NASA's 50th anniversary of the legislation that brought NASA into existence on October 1, 1958, and began this Nation's concerted effort to explore the heavens above us, and the universe beyond.

NASA also finds itself at a unique moment in its history, where it is undertaking a major shift in its contribution to the human exploration and utilization of space. In just two more years, we will see the completion of the International Space Station, which NASA has been developing, in cooperation with its 16 international partners, to serve as a unique laboratory in space—one that will finally be equipped with its full complement of research facilities, and inhabited by a full crew of six astronauts and researchers.

Three years ago, the Congress enacted legislation which, among many other things, designated the U.S. por-

tion of the space station—and the roughly fifty percent of our partner-built laboratories that we are allocated in exchange for launching and operating the station and its modules—as a National Laboratory. Already we are seeing the interest in using those unique orbiting facilities increase, as Memoranda of Understanding have been signed between NASA and the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture to pave the way for their use of those facilities for research that will benefit life on Earth. Other agreements have been signed and more are under development. The research future of the space station is beginning to shine brighter than it has in recent years.

NASA is preparing itself to turn its own focus outward from the Earth, once it has completed paving the way for others to carry forward the utilization of the space station and low-earth orbit. This legislation, like its predecessor in 2005, underscores the congressional commitment to see that new mission move forward—and even more quickly than currently planned, in terms of developing the postshuttle vehicles that will enable that new Vision for Exploration.

I am especially pleased that this legislation includes the clear recognition of a unique and important facility in my own State—the Michoud Assembly Facility—the important role it will play in the development and production of the space shuttle replacement vehicles, as it has done for over a quarter of a century in the space shuttle program. It includes language that will help to clarify the details of that role, for Michoud and for the other NASA facilities and Centers that most directly support human space launch development and operations, such as the nearby Stennis Research Center, the Marshall Space flight Center, Johnson Space Center, and, of course the Kennedy Space Center.

All of these facilities—and their extremely talented and capable employees—are facing what could be a difficult transition, as one system winds down and another grows up to take its place. This legislation demonstrates that the Congress is aware of the fear and uncertainty that can accompany such a transition, and includes initial steps we have taken to mitigate these concerns and address the impacts of such redirection of work and skills. We must act quickly and effectively to minimize the disruption of jobs—and people's lives and livelihood. Some of those impacts are already being felt, in Michoud and other facilities, as certain of the activities to support the space shuttle program are already winding down. The legislation includes language to help us know, well in advance, when more of those kinds of changes will occur, so that we can monitor them and ensure the tools and resources are in place to deal with them.

We have also been able to address the situation that has arisen recently as