

NASA AT 50 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT

J.T. JEZIERSKI

INTERVIEWED BY REBECCA WRIGHT

NASA HEADQUARTERS, WASHINGTON, D.C. – 20 MARCH 2007

WRIGHT: Today is March 20th, 2007. We are at NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to speak with J.T. Jezierski, who serves as NASA's Deputy Chief of Staff and as the agency's White House Liaison, for the NASA at 50 Oral History Project. Interviewer is Rebecca Wright. In preparation for the space agency's fiftieth anniversary the NASA Headquarters History Office commissioned this oral history project to gather thoughts, experiences, and reflections from NASA's top managers. The information recorded today will be transcribed and placed in the history archives here at NASA Headquarters, where it can be accessed for future projects.

Are there any questions that I can answer before we begin?

JEZIERSKI: No.

WRIGHT: Okay. Thanks again for providing the time in your schedule. In your position you coordinate events and communications between NASA and the White House and other agencies within the executive branch, as well as serving as Deputy Chief of Staff of the space agency. If you would, would you share more information about the scope of your responsibilities, and how you came to this position?

JEZIERSKI: Absolutely. Thank you for the opportunity to do this. It's an honor to work at NASA and to talk about what we do and my small contribution to our overall agency mission. I

came to NASA in July of 2003, from the Office of Presidential Personnel at the White House. I was at personnel, started there in 2001, and my position there was Deputy Associate Director.

Our job was placing political appointees at the various agencies, and in our portfolio was NASA, which was called the National Security and State Department portfolio. I worked with Courtney [A.] Stadd, whom I consider a mentor and a dear friend, and he informed me that he was going to be leaving his position as White House Liaison. He was also the Chief of Staff. We had talked and thankfully supported my shifting over to NASA. I had informed him, and I think he knew immediately upon our meeting, my love of this agency and the history.

So I came over in July of 2003 as the White House Liaison. The role of the White House Liaison is to coordinate, as you mentioned, all activities between the agency and the White House and all of the offices of the executive branch, including the various departments. It's also a personnel function, in that I coordinate and work with all of the political appointees at NASA. There are not many. Right now we have about twenty-five, and that includes the Senate-confirmed appointees (the Administrator, the Deputy Administrator), the nonconfirmed, the SESs [Senior Executive Service], the Schedule Cs, all of them are under my purview to bring in and work with. I'm their liaison, of course.

So I came onboard. I worked with then-Administrator [Sean] O'Keefe and Chief of Staff John [D.] Schumacher, worked with them and then when Administrator [Michael D.] Griffin came onboard in 2005 I stayed on as the White House Liaison. Then in the fall of 2005 I was fortunate that Administrator Griffin asked me, working with Chief of Staff Paul Morrell, to add the Deputy Chief of Staff role.

That allowed me to get more involved in the inner workings of the agency. My job includes other duties as assigned, of course, but then I'm also someone who likes tasks so that

the Chief of Staff, the Administrator, the Deputy Administrator can focus on the big-picture items, things they need to do.

So I've been doing that now almost four years here at the agency, and have learned a tremendous amount from individuals, but also about our government, and what our agency is trying to do, our mission. It's been quite a learning experience for me.

WRIGHT: Well, share some of those experiences with us. Although you've had a short time here, share with us some of the lessons that you've learned and can already apply to your job.

JEZIERSKI: Certainly. Well, when I came over to NASA I came in as I mentioned in July of 2003. The [Space Shuttle] *Columbia* [STS-107] accident, of course, was February 1st, 2003, so I came to the agency in, obviously, a very dark time for the agency, and a lot of uncertainties abounded within the agency of what we were going to do and what our mission was going to be.

When I came over I remember one of my first projects, one of the first meetings that I was sitting in on was how NASA was going to respond to the CAIB [*Columbia* Accident Investigation Board] Report, which was going to be coming out in the August/Labor Day/September timeframe of that year. So we went from focusing on that, that was the first thing. So it was truly baptism by fire to come in here and be facing the CAIB Report coming out, and then to see the development, to witness the policy discussions that were going on that led, to me, the red-letter day, the wonderful announcement in January of 2004 of the Vision for Space Exploration by President [George W.] Bush here at NASA Headquarters, in, as I say, January 2004.

So then when you see the back and forth, the discussions, the debate going on post-*Columbia* throughout the summer of '03, to the announcement of the vision in January of 2004, then the question throughout 2004, just the back and forth within Washington and across this country about the merits of the vision, whether it was sustainable, aspects to which we're still dealing with, and then also the political environment that was going on, whether it would have legs beyond the presidential election, after the presidential election to then start seeing the budget fights that went on, seeing all that and how it related directly to NASA was fascinating.

The other aspect of that for me, I've been very fortunate to work with two incredible individuals and mentors, Administrator O'Keefe and Dr. Griffin, Administrator Griffin, both with different leadership styles, but I learned and respect them both tremendously. Obviously, everyone knows their biographies and their backgrounds were different, and those were clearly reflected in the way they managed the organization, and pros and cons to both, I'm sure.

But to be able to witness and see how they managed and how they dealt with people, I'll be able to look back at that for a long time to come. Administrator O'Keefe had such an amazing challenge post-*Columbia* to bring this agency through, and the things that he was able to accomplish were admirable in terms of leading up to the vision, and now for Dr. Griffin with his incredible technical expertise, to harness that and put this agency on a foundation for years to come, it's just been incredible to watch that.

So those are the things that, very generally speaking, that I've been able to see, and also throughout the agency, how you get an agency of 18,000 civil servants across ten Centers to coalesce around this Vision for Space Exploration, and that's been, obviously, a challenge, but just to say, "This is what this agency is going to be doing," and everyone to get involved. It's been amazing.

WRIGHT: If we could stay on that subject for just a minute -- You mention the different leadership styles, and then both had a shared vision but not really, because one was trying to get back on a path, and then one is trying to take us to another path. Could you give us a little more insight of what you witnessed, especially through the transition of how one leadership style melded into another, [and share with us] what you saw watching these two administrators, and then even possibly how you helped shape the new vision that was coming through?

JEZIERSKI: Certainly. Well, Administrator O'Keefe was given the kind of task of being—they talk a lot about this between the President and First Lady about the role of the Comforter in Chief, as well as some of the management and leadership qualities they have to have, and that's what Administrator O'Keefe did, too.

He led us through one of the darkest periods of our agency's history, and he had to prove and show that NASA was still competent, that NASA was still important, and the NASA family could rally and bring us through that dark time. And I believe he did so, so much so that that allowed the President to have the confidence in the NASA workforce to give us the challenge to implement the Vision for Space Exploration.

When Dr. Griffin came onboard, he brought the technical expertise and the passion, and the absolute firm belief that the vision, technically and specifically, was the way this agency needed to go, and spoke not just to the big picture of space exploration as important and those kind of general themes, but really was able to connect deep with the engineers, the scientists, to say, "Look. For many reasons, not just the pie-in-the-sky, this is what America should be doing,

but for many reasons this is the path. As he often says, “If America is going to have a space program; this is the space program we need to have.”

And they just relate to people in different ways. I’d see that personally in their dynamics, they related to people differently. Their leadership styles are different, but they’re both effective, and that’s what’s admirable to me. What that has taught me and what I’ve been able to learn is that really when you’re a leader, it really is about the people you’re leading, and how you relate to them, and what you bring out in them, and to know who you’re leading. That’s the most important thing, I think, and I think they both have that ability to do that.

Mr. O’Keefe knew that everyone needed to rally around what this agency stood for, its existence. Dr. Griffin knows them because he’s been in their shoes, and so it’s a different perspective. But they both were able to rally and lead people, so that’s been fascinating.

One of the greatest honors—I consider it an honor, an opportunity I had—was to be able to stay onboard with this transition of administrators, and I was with Dr. Griffin during his confirmation hearings. Just to be able to spend time with him, and see the vision that he had for NASA. He had been at NASA before, so to say he hit the ground running is an understatement to the nth degree. So he knew what he wanted to do, and we really got going quickly because he didn’t have—thankfully, actually—because he didn’t have the time. We had a return-to-flight mission that we had to get going, had to fly.

So he was ready, and that was amazing to see that, and I will cherish the two or so months that he and I worked throughout his confirmation process. To see someone lay out, and when I say vision I’ll use that vision as the lower-case v, as opposed to the capital-letter V, Vision for Space Exploration, to then see Mike Griffin’s lower-case v, vision for how he was going to implement. I don’t mean to confuse folks, but that was inspiring to see, and something

that I needed to, because after you're in D.C. you need to recharge your batteries after a while, and to see him come onboard and just really guns blazing was exciting.

WRIGHT: When he promoted you to Deputy Chief of Staff he was quoted as saying that he appreciated your dedication to the task of reengaging the agency in the business of exploration. Can you define that for us, what you feel like you have done, and tell us what is your strategy from your position of being the Liaison to the White House, as well as the Deputy Chief of Staff? How do you help reengage the agency in the business of exploration in the position that you're in?

JEZIERSKI: My job is to, in the communications I have with folks at the White House, particularly with the White House but also at other agencies, is to make sure that NASA's on the radar screen, and to make sure that what we do is understood and valued. That's not to say that it's not, by any grand design, but just having worked in the White House I've seen this, that when you have issues of large significance, meaning the war, the war on terror, economic considerations, or in Washington the daily scandal de jour, if you will—I shouldn't say scandal, but just the latest headline of the day—that in that environment you have to just be a constant drumbeat for what we're doing, and to remind people that we're here.

Because what happens is, NASA doesn't have as big a challenge at this as other agencies do, because we, as we've seen, for good and bad, NASA can get in the headlines very quickly, sometimes at will, but to say that what we're doing is important, and it's not just—you know, it's interesting, because on the one hand NASA has an ability to get on the front pages, which is

good. On the other hand, you don't want to overlook the significant things we're doing, because people only see just the quick hits, "Oh, I saw you launched this last week," or, "I saw that."

You say, "Yes, but let me explain what that means, and let me explain to you how this fits in the overall picture of things." So it's a blessing and a curse. In terms of getting folks in the business of exploration, just to remind folks, and also one of the challenges we faced, continue to face, not as much, but we face is just to get people inspired in the building, in the building meaning within NASA, "This is what we're doing." And we faced that challenge in 2004 when the vision was announced, through to today, although hopefully less and less, but just to make sure that folks know this is where we're headed.

WRIGHT: Many times people think of exploration as being just human spaceflight, but as we move along toward setting this foundation for the Vision, there's also very much interest in what part robotics will play. What do you feel, or how will you communicate over the next years that there is more than just the human spaceflight element of NASA to those that you communicate with?

JEZIERSKI: Well, we communicate that through heralding our successes. When you talk about the continual operation of the rovers on Mars, and I forget the exact quote that they use, but, "This is day whatever in the ninety-day mission." I'm sorry, I don't know the exact number of the days, but just to say, "Look. Clearly it's significant to us," and again, we rely on our successes. That's what people know about, and so that's kind of the way we do it.

One of the things that Dr. Griffin has said is that exploration is not just activities, it's a mindset. This is what NASA should be doing. We should be always moving forward and

exploring, doing the challenging things, and whether that be manned or unmanned it falls under that category.

And also, part of it, going back to your previous question, is to make sure that—and it also goes back to something I was talking about before that is unique to NASA, in that you have people who work here, and this is so fascinating about NASA, you have people who've wanted to work here their entire lives. This is their life's ambition. But those people are not necessarily astronauts. Those people are not necessarily shuttle program managers, engineers even. These are people that work in HR [Human Resources], these are the people that make this building run, who've wanted to work at NASA, and that who are every day, you know the old cliché about working to put men on the Moon, that's what they're doing in their tasks.

And that's an interesting challenge that management faces, too, because folks here have more of a vested interest, because this is their life's work, this is what they've always wanted to do. And so people are very involved in what the agency is doing. They have a stake in what's going on.

I tease my friends, my other colleagues in the White House Liaison world to say, you know, although they may not have that at the Department of Labor, or at HHS [Health and Human Services], but there's the "cool factor" here that NASA has that we talk about, that is important and we have to recognize that. Whereas we can use that to inspire folks and get people to work really hard, you also have to be careful because you don't want to dampen that, and you don't want to do things that, not to be cliché, but it's true, you don't want to trample on somebody's dream. That's why they're here (working at NASA), so that's part of the management challenges that we have at NASA that I, frankly, don't think a lot of other places have. That's always a consideration.

WRIGHT: NASA's history, as you and I talked earlier, is very vast and it's full, and before NASA it was NACA [National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics], and its primary focus was aeronautics. What is your vision of keeping aeronautics as part of NASA, or is that part of the strategy from your area, to keep the aeronautics a vital part of the future years of NASA?

JEZIERSKI: Absolutely. I think you see under the leadership Dr. Lisa Porter, and in the President's statement in December announcing the National Aeronautics Policy, first time a presidential policy directive has come out on this issue. I think it's definitely, absolutely, a part of what we're doing, and she's (Dr. Porter) the right person to lead us into the future, definitely.

WRIGHT: You've talked about being excited about working here, and after four years, you've gotten a more fully day-to-day understanding of how NASA works. What do you feel its role to be in the nation, its impact? What do you feel [NASA's] role is in today's society, and what kind of impact do you feel that NASA should have on the American people?

JEZIERSKI: NASA should show, and be the leader in showing, the best of America in terms of the ability to define a mission, the ability to complete a mission, and the ability to inspire individuals of all backgrounds to be able to participate in that mission, and to say that at our best, this is what America and Americans can do. I think people are proud of NASA and people are proud of our achievements. We can't take that for granted, and we have to continue to not rest on what happened before I was born, in 1969, to be frank, and move forward and say, "This is

the agency that you should be proud of, and hopefully will continue to be proud of, because we're moving forward."

NASA should be a symbol of what is right about America, and also, about American government efficiency, results, productivity, those kinds of things. We're a part of the government. We also shouldn't forget that, and recognize that we should be always a good steward of the taxpayers' money, resources, and trust. That's what NASA should symbolize. It should symbolize to the American people on a very technical level that we're money well spent, and also it should be an example to other government agencies of effectiveness.

WRIGHT: As NASA strives to achieve the vision of exploration, in your position what challenges do you foresee as far as budget and fiscal support to accomplish those goals?

JEZIERSKI: Our challenge is the same as any other agency, and that is to demonstrate our, relevance is not a fair word, because we are relevant, but this is a weird phrase to use, our relative relevance compared to other issues. We are one of several federal agencies fighting for limited resources, and in an economic environment where budgets are being cut across the board, and while there's a war going on that's going to be going on, this war on terror is going to be going on for a while, and so that's our challenge.

When you look at our budget and our requirements over decades, that's the challenge. The challenge is simply just lack of money, lack of money at NASA, but lack of money in the federal government (*although that is not to say we aren't spending enough, but that there is considerable competition for the funds that are available*). So we don't want to be an undue burden to the American taxpayer generally speaking, because we know there are other things

within the government that need to be done. We just have to show that what we are doing is important.

WRIGHT: Since you've been here your responsibilities have expanded, because you've taken on a new position. You also mentioned about working under two different administrators. Do you expect your position to evolve over the next years that you're here, in different ways?

JEZIERSKI: Well, I do because of a couple of reasons. One, because I deal with political issues and I'm a political appointee of the Bush administration, proudly so, knowing that our time, the sand is running through the hourglass on the Bush administration, there will be a lot of challenges. So as this administration winds down, and thus my tenure and a lot of our tenures winds down, that's going to change the dynamics a lot.

But also, my job day today has always been day to day. I have one of those jobs in Washington that is not—I don't have the luxury to be able to set out a plan, you know, "I want to do this in two months." My job by definition as Deputy Chief of Staff has always been day to day, not in terms of the status of it, but in terms of my assignments and things. I do things as they come and as they're assigned, which neither good nor bad, that's what I do.

WRIGHT: Well, tell me about some of the events and episodes that you've encountered since you've been here.

JEZIERSKI: Oh, certainly. Well, as I mentioned before, working the transition between administrators was definitely one of the highlights. But also it's just—really, I can't think of

anything offhand, forgive me, in terms of specifics, but just things within the building that happen. Whether it be personnel issues or “Go cover this meeting”; but I’m here to provide support, and in my role it trickles down, meaning that it’s not really about me. If the Administrator can’t do something and if it gets bumped somewhere else, I’m standing by ready.

WRIGHT: I know that you’re basically on call here to do job duties and tasks, but does your position also give you the opportunity to be on call to the White House as well?

JEZIERSKI: Well, yes. But that is more of, “Hey, we need this information really quick.” It’ll come at odd times, too, to say, “We’ve got this issue coming up. Can you confirm this for me?” That happens pretty frequently, actually, and it’s usually in response to, say, “Hey, we heard this, is this true?” that kind of thing. That’s my job.

WRIGHT: Since you’ve been here have you been able to perceive NASA’s culture. Especially after *Columbia* there was a lot of discussion about culture issues within the organization. Can you share with us what your perception is of NASA’s culture at this time, and where you think it will be?

JEZIERSKI: Well, one of my great—I shouldn’t say great regrets, but I would be so fascinated now being here for four years, I really wish that I could have been here pre-*Columbia*, to be able to make that comparison.

But the culture, I don’t know whether it’s the difference between the NASA culture or just the bureaucracy, culture of a bureaucracy, not even NASA, but what that means, and there’s

the culture between NASA Headquarters and the other Centers and those challenges, but then also kind of what I touched on earlier about the pride factor, and how pleased and excited people are to be working here.

As far as what CAIB mentioned, as far as our culture, again I wasn't here so I shouldn't talk about that. I don't know anything about that because I wasn't here. But I did see definitely a united sense of purpose after that. No one wants *Columbia* to have happened in vain, and people still feel that way, we have to remind ourselves of that.

WRIGHT: What do you see as the most challenging aspect of what you'll be facing during the rest of your tenure?

JEZIERSKI: Well, I'll speak to the agency first, and obviously budget is number one. Also, just the technical aspects of launching successful Shuttle missions, obviously as we've seen, the victim of hailstorms and such. The challenge here for me, will be to keep people engaged, keep people focused when individuals are on different timelines. We're talking about, and it's a small number of people, but it's the leadership of this agency, that as I mentioned earlier the sand is running through the hourglass, that we've got a year and six months left.

So we've got a year and six months left to set the foundation for a vision that is going to last for ten, twenty, thirty years. So when you have people talking about setting program timelines that are decades long, presenting those plans to leadership that are only going to be here for a year and six months, that's going to be a challenge, and it's not unique to NASA, obviously. The President himself has to go through with this, but that's going to be a challenge,

no doubt about it, and it'll be a question of what steps we take to alleviate that. So that'll be our number-one challenge.

WRIGHT: I'm just curious -- when you said you came in in July of 2003, were you aware that the Vision for [Space] Exploration was going to be announced?

JEZIERSKI: No, not at all. No. The only policy statements that had been made at that time, quasi-policy statement, was when the President made his remarks to the nation after the *Columbia* accident, saying that the Shuttle would fly again, we would return to flight. That was the only one that kind of you could hang your hat on, as far as then the discussions really kicked into—well, first of all, everyone waited to see what CAIB said, and then I know that the policy discussions really kicked in in the fall of '03.

And then I wasn't privy to these meetings, but I heard that over the Christmas holiday of '03, and then the announcement in January of '04, but it was not at all a foregone conclusion that the vision would be announced at all, let alone when, when I came onboard.

WRIGHT: What great timing for you to be here as that announcement was there.

JEZIERSKI: Well, very fortunate in that regard, yes. It's just been, when I came onboard to go from CAIB, to the vision announcement, to helping on the [Edward C. "Pete"] Aldridge [Jr.] Commission [President's Commission on Implementation of United States Space Exploration Policy, June, 2004], to Administrator O'Keefe leaving, to Dr. Griffin coming onboard, it's just been a lot of events occurring, so I've been very fortunate in that regard.

WRIGHT: Although your tenure may be affected when this administration is moving on, why would you encourage someone, or what are your thoughts if someone would come to you and say, “I’m thinking about starting a career in NASA.” What would you say to them?

JEZIERSKI: To absolutely try, absolutely do it. I think that the greatest thing about this agency is that you never know who you’ll meet and what you’ll learn in the hall, because there are so many amazing people. Some of the best conversations I’ve had, because I’ve tried to use my lack of experience, technical experience as an advantage, to be able to just—actually, it’s not playing, it is ignorance—to go to folks and say, “Can you tell me what you do? I don’t understand it. Could you explain this to me?” And some of the best conversations I have had are with people about that.

That’s been inspiring on two levels, because first of all I’m able to learn, which I love. Secondly, in doing that, the people get excited, and you see their passion, and with that it inspires me, so that’s been incredible. NASA is full of people like that. In every Center and every office there are people like that. I say that to answer your question, because that’s the kind of environment you have.

Plus I think that I would definitely encourage a person to join the history of the agency, and to contribute to that history. It’s a good place to be. And here, as opposed to—I was going to say opposed to the private sector—but you’re serving your country here as well, because of our status as a government agency.

WRIGHT: Well, looking back through my topic points I think we've gone through most of them, and you've kind of talked about this, though I'll ask you again so that you can make sure that we have the points of emphasis. What do you believe to be NASA's most important role for the nation?

JEZIERSKI: Well, NASA should be the agency that Americans look to when we talk about exploration. That's what we do, we're in the business of exploration, and Americans should be able to be proud of our country and of our government by looking at NASA's achievements. That's what our role should be, really, to be the agency that exemplifies that for the American people, the American taxpayer, I should say. That's the most important thing.

WRIGHT: Well, share with me any other information you would like to about your experiences here, and your thoughts about NASA.

JEZIERSKI: Sure. Well, I would like to add as far as the history goes that there's a lot of talk about, and some people have preconceived notions about political appointees and who they are and what they do. Political appointees are individuals who are only here for a short amount of time, appointed by the President or his administration to work at agencies, and I am proud of the people who have served here and currently serve here as political appointees, and I hope that people will not look down upon political appointees, but know that we serve at the pleasure of the President, but we also want to work here at NASA.

I've not had to twist arms to get any of our political appointees to come here. There's always been a double interest to serve, because, one, they want to serve this President, but then

also work here at NASA, and I hope that people see that. We may not all be engineers or scientists, but we have a passion for what we do, and want to work together and learn, and I just hope that people recognize that.

I'm very grateful too, as I say, both administrators that I've worked for, who have been incredible mentors to me, and friends. It's been—I've learned so much from them, it's beyond any tape that you have here today. And people like Courtney Stadd. I want to say this for history's sake—that I couldn't do my job without my friend Scott Pace, who is one of the smartest individuals I've ever known. I would say to Scott, and also to Dr. Griffin but particularly to Scott, to say that he's taught me everything I know about space, but he hasn't taught me everything he knows about space.

I met Scott and Courtney the first day I came to NASA Headquarters when I was working in Presidential personnel and did a visit to NASA, and I'm thankful now to call them both colleagues and friends. But people like that that I've worked with, that are just incredible; I won't be naming names. But one of the things I wanted to add if I could, we were talking about just to get for the record the activities since I've been here that the President has been involved with. Do you want me to do that?

WRIGHT: Please.

JEZIERSKI: Okay. I'll try and keep this as interesting as I can, and go through it as quickly as I can, but also just to get the facts out there. President George W. Bush is a fan of NASA, but also a fan of space. He definitely likes what we do, and it's noticed at the White House. So we've

seen that in a lot of the things that he's done, and one of the ways that he's done that is by making time for NASA.

One of the things we do is we take crews over to the White House when they come back (from their missions). The first activity I was involved with was in 2003. In October we took over the [International Space Station] Expedition 6 crew, [Kenneth D.] Bowersox and [Donald R.] Pettit, and their Russian counterpart [Nikolai Budarin] over to meet with the President, and Administrator O'Keefe went over. These are just brief photo ops [opportunities], but the pictures are released to the press and I think it's exciting for the astronauts, and it's good because it shows that the President's involved. It also gets us in front of him and in front of his staff, so that's good. That was in 2003.

Of course in 2004 everyone knows about the January announcement. Oh, excuse me, I'm sorry. Before that, in January of 2004 the President made a call to JPL [Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, California] in January, I believe it was January sixth. He called JPL, Dr. [Charles] Elachi, and the Mars Rover Team upon the successful landing of the first Mars Rover, talked with them, congratulated them on the successful mission, so that was exciting. He called from the Oval Office.

Then, of course, in mid-January, January fourteenth he had the vision announcement here at Headquarters. That was exciting because I had not been involved in a presidential event before, and just all the work that went into it. Glen Mahone was the head of Public Affairs at the time. He and his team did a terrific job of actually preparing. There were questions about where the event was going to be held, and it was decided to be held at NASA Headquarters. They built the stage up, set up the room, and all the preparations for it, it was pretty exciting to see.

The President came in, he met with a group of folks beforehand. Actually, he met with a group of astronauts beforehand, including John [W.] Young was here, Gene [Eugene A.] Cernan was here, because the President quoted him in his speech of the Apollo era, and then some Shuttle astronauts and [International Space] Station. He talked with them and he said, I'll never forget, he said, "I'm really excited to be here. I'm really excited to be announcing what I'm going to be announcing today," and that was exciting.

But then he also added sort of a, "Let's keep our focus also on winning this war on terror," which was not prompted. He just sort of said—I was telling you because it added, it combined the two. I don't want to say combined the two, but showed that it was not mutually exclusive that, yes, he was excited about what he was going to be doing, but that we were still focused on winning the war on terror. So it showed that it was definitely a focus.

And then afterwards I believe it was Dr. [Edward J.] Weiler, and I think Orlando Figueroa showed him a model of one of the Mars Rovers. We presented him a Mars Rover, a model of the Mars Rover, which I'm told is in his personal study.

Actually, a funny story. I was called, I think it was last year, from the President's personal secretary, who said that they were doing some renovation in the Oval Office and in the West Wing, and they dropped the Mars Rover model. So went and picked it up, got it fixed, took it back. [laughs] And so it shows that he—usually some of those things, those presentation items we call them, just go to the library or into a file, but that one is significant, that he's proud of.

So, of course, the vision speech was just an incredible day, never forget that. He was down in Headquarters and now there's a plaque downstairs where he announced the vision, and that was just tremendously exciting for NASA.

Later that summer, obviously in July we celebrated the thirty-fifth anniversary of Apollo 11, and we were going to just take the crew of Apollo 11 over (to the White House), and it ended up being—that was when we had the event over at the [National] Air and Space Museum, awarding the Ambassador of Exploration Awards with the lunar samples, and so then it ended up being that they had invited all of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo astronauts and their spouses to the White House.

I think we maybe had about twenty, twenty-five Apollo-era astronauts go. That may be a little high now that I think about it, maybe no more than twenty. But we had [Neil A.] Armstrong, [Buzz] Aldrin, and [Michael] Collins go over with several other—Senator [Harrison H. “Jack”] Schmitt was there, and Mr. Cernan, and John Young. I don’t remember all the names at this point, but just seeing the three of them together, Apollo 11, was very exciting. They all went into the White House to meet with the President, and then afterwards the three Apollo 11 they did a few interviews.

They did a White House chat, and there’s a picture of Mr. Armstrong with Barney the dog that’s kind of interesting. But just to see those three and the history, and was told they hadn’t been together at an event like that for quite a while. So that was very exciting, to be a part of that, and again, that was great.

At that time I mentioned, part of the vision was the creation of the Aldridge Commission, which looked at where we were going with implementing the vision. I was a staff member as the White House Liaison, on that commission, and at the end when the report came out they presented it to the Vice President. That was in the fall of ’04, late summer, early fall of ’04, presented to the Vice President in the Roosevelt Room. I helped coordinate that meeting.

In 2005 we took—it's very difficult to get on the President's schedule, obviously, and so we took a set of Expedition crew members over (not each one after their individual mission). It's easier that way, particularly when there's only one American crew member (per Expedition). I feel it's difficult, but also feel it's not a good use of the President's time to be continually requesting for one person, so we combined the visit of Expedition 7, 8, 9, and 10. So they went over. I believe there was Ed [Edward T.] Lu and Leroy Chiao, I think Mike [C. Michael] Foale, they and their families went over to the White House and met with the President in the Oval Office.

Then we got to July, the launch of 114, STS-114, return-to-flight mission, and the first mission when they had a lot of congressional interest and congressional delegations going. That launch was scrubbed, which was disappointing, but good in another aspect in that the day they rescheduled it for, the First Lady was going to Orlando [Florida] to give a speech, and [Florida] Governor Jeb [John Ellis] Bush, apparently his office mentioned to her, said, "Well, you know, this launch is going on. I want to go to the launch."

Which led to her attending 114, and I was able to help facilitate a little bit of that, and to watch it was just incredible. We watched it from Banana Creek, and then she spoke to the launch team afterwards. I had heard also that she was very moved by it, to see it, and it was very powerful. And that was my first launch as well, to see, obviously since I came in in '03. So that was exciting.

I helped with the President calling the crew of 114 in orbit, while they were on orbit, he called them. There was a video telecon between the two, the crew and him. That was fun to help kind of coordinate as well. Of course our folks at JSC [NASA Johnson Space Center,

Houston, Texas] did the work on that, but again, that speaks to what I do in my job, just kind of help facilitate paperwork.

It's usually two waves (for these visits to the Oval Office). One is when I put the request in, which is a lot of paperwork and background, which is fine. But then the week before and the day of, is just all about that, and it takes up all my time, because it's back and forth between (me and the White House.) "Does [E.] Michael Fincke want to be called Mike?" It's all those little things. It's just all encompassing, which is fun because hopefully it pays off in that everyone has a good time and that goes well.

In February of 2006, the 114 crew went over to the White House for their visit, first Shuttle crew we had taken over, obviously, since *Columbia*, and I think that went well, Commander [Eileen M.] Collins and her crew and their families.

Then for the [STS] 121 launch in July of last year, of '06, the Vice President showed interest, and he was going to be at Daytona [Florida] that night for a (NASCAR) night race, and so he was going to come down. I went down early to help with Pam Adams, who I have to mention is an angel and is one of the best people at this agency at what they do. She's one of the best people at what her job is. Worked with the advance team and he (the Vice President) came and walked around some of the facilities. Scott Thurston was his tour guide. He and his wife, Dr. Lynne Cheney and some of their grandchildren, and that was very exciting. You could tell he was excited as well. He enjoyed it. Unfortunately there was a scrub, but he came and showed his support for NASA, so that was good.

The President called 121 as well, but that call was not video, that was just—and it wasn't actually a public call, either. The 114 call was on C-SPAN, it was on the news, it was covered

live, everyone got to see it. The 121 call was just personal, it was just a, “Hello, keep up the good work,” kind of thing.

Then in October, we had a bunch of crews, a back log of crews to go over to the White House for their visits. So it was 121, 115, and Expeditions 11, 12, and 13. Jeff [Jeffrey N.] Williams, Expedition 13, I think, had just come back maybe a week before, because he couldn’t really stand for long periods of time, so he had to sit and we had to keep an eye on him and make sure he was okay.

That event was so large because it was so many crews and their families, that instead of being in the Oval Office it was in the East Room of the White House, and so unlike the other visits I actually was able to kind of peek my head in and watch as the President greeted them, and he’s just very enthusiastic and really enjoyed talking with the crews.

And then in 2007 they requested astronaut presence at an event for Black History Month, and so Joan [E.] Higginbotham and Robert [L.] Curbeam [Jr.], who had just come back from [STS] 116, went over to represent NASA. They were recognized during the event. So those are kind of the presidential White House involvement of things that I wanted to share.

And then I wanted to add one other thing that I’ve been involved with. I’m extremely honored to have been a small part in helping with the Congressional Space Medal of Honors, presented by the President on behalf of Congress. I think there were only—I’m trying to remember the number now. I think it was thirteen had been presented when I came onboard, and one of the things that Administrator O’Keefe told me in my first meeting with him when I was onboard, he gave me a list of things and he said, “I want these things done.”

And one of them was working the paperwork to submit for the Congressional Space Medal of Honor. It was for the crews, posthumously, of the *Columbia* and [Space Shuttle]

Challenger [STS 51-L], and we worked—I'm sorry, I forgot about this visit actually, but it will come now when I talk about this—we took the *Columbia* families, they went over to see the President. We took them over on the one-year anniversary. They were back in town, and at that ceremony they were told that the crew would be receiving the Congressional Space Medal of Honor, and so that was very moving that we were able to do that. We actually then presented it here at NASA Headquarters, which was very, very powerful.

Then I was truly honored in July of that year that we did the same for the *Challenger* families. Personally, that was very moving to me because when I was growing up I was a big NASA fan, and I remember in school, where I was when the *Challenger* accident happened, and that kind of was one of those events in all of our lives that shapes you, and I think my generation, we're a Shuttle generation, and that was truly a defining moment for my generation, and to then see the family members.

We had a TV showing video clips of their training, of the *Challenger* training, and to be able to be a part of that was incredibly moving just on many levels. It was just very touching, and I was very honored to be a part of that, and honored to be in an agency that takes care of our own like that, remembers our history and learns from our history. That was exciting.

Then finally we got another one approved and signed off by the President for Robert [L.] Crippen, for Bob Crippen, and presented at the twenty-fifth anniversary of STS-1 in April of last year. That was exciting, too, because I remember he's kind of a personal hero of mine as well, the pilot of STS-1, a true pioneer.

I look up to so many folks that I've read about, and then to see them in the halls and have conversations with them, has been quite an experience and quite an education. I think I got them

all, as far as the President goes, in my role as White House Liaison to make sure that history remembers that.

WRIGHT: I'm glad you did. It gives a great understanding of that aspect of your job. I wanted to close with one more question. You've certainly explained your passion and your drive to do this job as well as you can. Are there some aspects of [the job] that you hope that you can accomplish before you leave this position, something that you are hoping that you can do that the person who walks in your shoes next will remember that you did and that they can carry on?

JEZIERSKI: Well, I hope that I've put some—this is very boring, bureaucratic—but I hope I've put some processes in place that it would be an easy transition for someone to come in and see what I've done and put plans and procedures in place that things can just happen on their own.

On a personal level, I'm one of those people that I prefer to be in the background. I'm a staffer, I'm a staff person. That's what I like to do. And whether this is good or bad, I think I'm one of those folks that probably, hopefully this says more about my work, that I'm more noticed when I'm gone than when I'm here, and I think that'll be something, too.

I should add, by the way, on a personal level, that being a part of NASA is an honor. I'm from West Virginia. There's not a huge space contingent there, but there was a children's book that a lady from my hometown wrote called *No Starry Nights*. It was about the fact that where I'm from, this is a steel-mill town so you never could see the stars, because there's just the haze in the air. But I come from a family that says that you can see them even though they're not there. They're there.

That kind of thing is important going forward. I mention the support of my family, it's helpful to me, because as I mentioned, a lot of times I'm very nervous going into meetings, because I could get eaten alive, because I don't know the technical stuff, I don't know the engineering, but you've got to go in there and say, "This is what we're all about, so let's work together. Don't try to overwhelm me with theories and stats, because you'll get me, but let's just figure this out." So that's the challenge and the thrill of it all.

WRIGHT: I certainly appreciate you spending time with us today and sharing all this great information.

JEZIERSKI: Thank you for doing this. It's my true honor. Thank you.