

Throughout his years as Vice President to President Reagan, George H.W. Bush was a stalwart supporter of America's space program and NASA in particular.

He seemed to be always drawn to the flight crews, whether in times of stellar success or crushing defeat. As 1981 drew to a close and the morning after Joe Engle and I touched down on STS-2, he and Barbara flew to Houston to have breakfast at the Johnson Space Center with the crews of the first two Space Shuttle *Columbia* missions. They flew to the Kennedy Space Center to be with the crew's families the night of the *Challenger* disaster in 1986. And in the middle of his campaign for president in 1988, I was with him on the Edwards lakebed waiting to welcome home Rick Hauck and his *Discovery* crew from their triumphant return-to-flight mission.

So in the summer of the first year of his presidency as the 20th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing approached in 1989, it seemed natural that he would announce his vision for space exploration. On July 20th on Washington's Mall with the Smithsonian's Air and Space museum as a backdrop and with Neil Armstrong and his crew behind him on the stage, he made a soaring speech. He said that America would finally build the Space Station, return to the moon "this time to stay," then on to Mars.

In the coming years the Space Station survived a bruising floor vote in the Congress, but the exploration initiative was simply not to be.

Nevertheless, America's space program never had a more natural supporter than when George Bush was in the oval office. My favorite times as NASA Administrator was when I would take the recently-flown Space Shuttle crews and their families to the White House and watch the president laugh and share flying stories with them.