

**Jud Ready**

# God Speed, John Glenn

Take yourself back to Dec. 15, 1972. Capsule communicator Gordon Fullerton, in Houston, reads a message from U.S. President Richard M. Nixon to crew members of Apollo 17 as they are about to leave the lunar surface, stating, "This may be the last time in this century that men will walk on the moon." A quarter million miles from Earth as he was departing the lunar surface, Apollo astronaut Harrison H. Schmitt could hardly believe what he was hearing. Surely, humanity would return to the moon in the nearly 30 years remaining in the century. For Nixon to dash the hopes of an entire generation with such a statement was unfathomable to Schmitt, according to "A Man on the Moon," by Andrew Chalkin, published in 1994.

Yet, almost imperceptibly, that lack of vision displayed by the U.S. government at the end of the Apollo era became ingrained in the general population, and NASA has never been the same.

Today, it is painfully obvious that Nixon was right all along, that humans will not walk on the moon again during the 20th century. The space station and space shuttle projects, in favor of which Apollo was cancelled, have yet to materialize as promised.

The Skylab space station was a reality for nine months during 1973-1974, but it then went unmanned until it fell from

the sky in 1979.

The space shuttle, though a splendid marvel of engineering, is hardly the efficient, low-maintenance, reliable and economical spacecraft of the future it was touted to be. We now find ourselves at a critical cusp in our space evolution, a time when there is no inspiration, no sense of wonder, no real exploration being conducted in manned space flight.

Many feel a malaise toward the U.S. space agency. A gloom of endless revisions hovers over the international space station. Now comes U.S. Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) back into the forefront and onto the front page with news of another orbital flight.

Many scoff, and say the flight is only a half-billion dollar joy ride, a thinly veiled public relations event or a political payback, or that the so-called aging research could have been carried out by several other, more qualified veteran shuttle astronauts.

Even if these arguments are true, I would counter that Glenn is a hero in every sense of the word.

He is man who possesses an eloquent tongue and exudes wit and charm, a man that can rouse the United States from its media-induced intellectual slumber with this single trip back into space.

He alone can inspire the nation again, create a sense of wonder in both young and old, and help NASA turn a page (a page that the agency has languished on for more than two dozen years) and once again initiate a program of real exploration.

For we are at a critical juncture in

our journey into infinity, a time when NASA is attempting to construct, over a half dozen years and by an equal number of nations, a space station to be hurled into orbit. It is and will be a program with unknown costs, incalculable benefits and seemingly unconquerable engineering challenges.

Glenn is in a unique position and must take this opportunity to do his utmost to make Americans aware of the special destiny they hold with the stars.

He must not only capture their attention during his nine days in orbit in October, but he must hold their attention beyond the five-second sound bite or video clip.

Upon his return from low Earth orbit, Glenn must tout the wonders of space exploration — and the justifications for its continuation and expansion beyond low Earth orbit — to his colleagues in Washington.

He must rekindle the long-forgotten, Apollo-era dream that humans would be living and working on the moon and beyond during the early 21st century.

Glenn must make it his personal mission to give a pep-talk to young and old at every possible opportunity.

He can spark a vision of the future in people's minds, reinforcing the idea that exploration lies between the known and the unknown. He can reaffirm the indomitable American frontier spirit while speaking across the country.

It will be this repeated reminder of our own unquenchable desire to explore that will make a difference and perhaps rescue this nation, this space program and the current generation from a downward spiral of visionlessness that was self-induced 10 days before Christmas in 1972.

God speed, John Glenn. May you have good fortune throughout your formidable mission.

## LETTERS

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the same "unproductive" behavior he accuses me of exhibiting. One would have hoped for a little research and reason from someone who calls himself "The Science Guy."

While I wish the world were the rational, objective place Mr. Nye dreams of, the simple fact is that some people make a profession out of conducting jihads against certain technologies. It probably gives meaning to their lives, it may help sell their books, and it may even get them speaking engagements and television appearances. What it doesn't do is help the public develop an informed opinion. Fortunately, the majority of voters in this country were on the side of the mission.

I have the utmost respect for the American voters and the utmost contempt for those who routinely try to deceive them by twisting stories to fit unreasoned biases.

In the future, I look forward to seeing Mr. Nye work "to convince the public of the inherent safety of the mission" as he says in his letter. He has been silent for far too long.

**GARY L. BENNETT**  
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