

EDITORIAL

After the Houston Flood, 1,000 Turn Out To Commemorate Kennedy Moon Address

by Kesha Rogers

We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard. . . .

Tuesday, Sept. 12, marked the 55th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's Moon Speech in Rice Stadium. In celebration of that historic event which inspired so many, nearly 1,000 people piled into the Stude Concert Hall on the Rice University Campus. The event marking this historic date was titled, "Failure Is Not an Option: Embodying the Credo, 'We Do This Not Because It Is Easy but Because It Is Hard.'" The featured guest speaker was Apollo 13 Astronaut Fred Haise. Ellen Ochoa, Director of Johnson Space Center, also spoke during a brief moderated question-and-answer session along with Haise.

The President of Rice University, David Leebron, in his opening remarks, quoted these very words uttered by President John F. Kennedy in his first lecture at Rice University on Sept. 12, 1962:

We meet at a college noted for knowledge, in a city noted for progress, in a state noted for strength, and we stand in need of all three, for we meet in an hour of change and challenge, in a decade of hope and fear, in an age of both knowledge and ignorance. The greater our knowledge increases, the greater our ignorance unfolds.

Mr. Leebron explained that in the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey that had devastated the Texas region—as now Irma has done to the Florida coast—those words of John F. Kennedy were just as relevant today as they were when they were first heard 55 years ago.

Eighty-four-year-old astronaut Fred Haise gave an awe-inspiring speech to the packed crowd, which had exceeded everyone's expectations for attendance. He spoke about the history of the United States' manned space program, and the harrowing story of the Apollo 13 mission of 1970. Col. Haise was the Lunar Module pilot for Apollo 13. The mission of Apollo 13 was to land in the Fra Mauro area of the Moon, but an explosion on board the spacecraft forced the crew to circle the Moon instead, without landing, and the Fra Mauro site was reassigned to Apollo 14.

In speaking about his experience aboard Apollo 13, Haise recounted the tragic loss of life on Apollo 1 in 1967, after a fire broke out in the cockpit as the spacecraft was sitting on the launch pad, killing all three astronauts. The lessons learned from that tragic event, and the commitment made then that "failure is not an option," saved the lives of Haise and his crewmates later, as he explained. The sacrifice of those who had lost their lives before, may just have saved the lives of others after them.

I think that this is a notable lesson for today. Will we learn the lesson of Harvey? Will we build the infrastructure we need to ensure that not another

life will be lost due to man-made error and negligence? So much has been lost, so many have sacrificed—how will we right the wrongs and make the new discoveries which will ensure a better future ahead?

I asked Col. Haise about the lessons that might be learned from the space program and Apollo, that would help to guide the nation during this period of crisis in the aftermath of the hurricanes.

He responded by emphasizing the importance of having the right leader, the necessity of teamwork for rebuilding and infrastructure, and the need to put fully adequate financial resources into that rebuilding—which can only come from a Federal mission, of

the sort that Kennedy understood was needed to make Apollo a success.

During the question-and-answer session, Ochoa toed the line about NASA's increasingly shifting to reliance on privatized space flight, but Col. Haise bluntly pointed out these private companies only exist because of NASA, and, unlike NASA, if they don't make a profit, they cease to have a mission.

Col. Haise concluded by highlighting the unique quality of human beings to make discoveries, unlike any animal. No pig or dolphin can build a spacecraft, he said, but you can. The audience gave his speech a standing ovation and left the room greatly inspired, with great hope for the future.