

**Remarks by the Honorable Sean O’Keefe
NASA Administrator
Loyola University Commencement Address
New Orleans, Louisiana
"A Life That Matters"
May 17, 2003**

Good morning. Father Knoth and Dr. Voight, thank you for that warm Crescent City welcome. Actually it is really breezy today. It passed balmy about an hour ago. I feel truly blessed to be back at the Marquette Horseshoe here at Loyola University. Frankly, working as I do in Washington DC, I’m always thrilled to journey *anywhere* that is far from the beltway, but especially to a city and a University I love so dearly. Thank you so much for having me here and for the tremendous honor that's been bestowed.

Let's begin by asking the graduates or soon-to-be graduates to please stand with me for a moment. We need to recognize the people who have *really* made all this possible – the parents in the audience. Please join me in a round of applause for them.

As the father of three children who have yet to begin college, I can only stand in awe of the hard work and financial staying power that our parents have shown and those my parents found during my years here...and that began three decades ago. And my children are here with me today: Lindsey, Jonathan and Kevin. What lies ahead are exciting challenges for each of you. And what lies ahead for your mom and me are exciting challenges as well, I can assure you.

It is truly an amazing personal moment to be back here, standing on this podium to receive an honorary degree at an institution I love so dearly. The last time I attended a commencement here at Loyola, I was 26 years younger, a little lighter, and my hair had a different color entirely at the time and there was a little more of it. But like many of the graduates here today, I was recovering nicely from the non-stop festivities of the week before commencement! The advantage that I had and my classmates had was we were not coping with the challenges presented by graduation following closely on the heels of two long weekends of Jazz Fest at the Fairgrounds. I doubt that I could keep the pace today.

So much of what lay ahead in my life on that day in 1977 would have been incomprehensible to me at the time. So instead of the week run-up of festivities leading to this event, it has prompted me and Laura, my wife and best friend, to reflect on the events of these last several years. Being here is a wonderful yet very, very surreal moment for me. Again, my thanks to you all for inviting me and for the extraordinary honor bestowed today. I will cherish this always.

But speaking of the past, as the Irish say, you have to draw a line in life ... on one side of it, put the past ... and on the other, the future ... for some people, the hard part is deciding which side of the line you want to live on ... Well today, despite the renown Irish tendency to dwell so often in the past I'll focus on the future – particularly your future.

The object of a commencement address is to be brief and be gone (laughter). That's a little more enthusiastic an encouragement than I hoped for, but I'll accept that. Part of the object of a speaker is to be informative or entertaining for a few moments, that's a bonus. It is in this spirit that I'm going to take few minutes and talk with you about two truly remarkable

people I have met in the course of my journey through public service. And in the course of telling you their stories, I hope you'll be inspired, as I have been by their tremendous accomplishments and their modest start. My ulterior motive here is to make you think about the future...and to consider for a moment the possibility of public service, a professional calling that began for me here during my years at Loyola.

This was not a new theme here at Loyola, during the time I was here, and it certainly is not now. You are all about to graduate from a Jesuit, Catholic school ... an institution with a long history of service. Father Knoth has said, "in the end, we help people to develop into *women and men for others*, which our world needs so badly." I submit that a wonderful way to become a "man or woman for others" is through the route of public service.

So let me talk for just a moment about two remarkable people with whom I am proud to say I have had the opportunity to work in public service. They lived lives that mattered greatly in the course of their careers, and contributed to this country in deep and fundamental ways. And the two people you may vaguely recognize—they aren't the most recognizable people by virtue of their circumstances, but you'll recall them in just a moment.

One was a woman, an immigrant to America who devoted her life to the search for knowledge and the advancement of mankind to the stars. Her name was Kalpana Chawla, and she made the ultimate sacrifice on the Space Shuttle Columbia at the age of 41 just a few months ago.

The other is a man – a Navy Admiral as a matter of fact, a true hero of this nation in peace and war – who stood shoulder-to-shoulder with me in some of the most challenging moments that I had during my time as

Secretary of the Navy. His name is Admiral Stan Arthur, and he retired several years ago from the Navy after a superb forty-year career in public service as a military officer and a four-star Admiral.

Now each of them led lives of public service that mattered deeply, and this morning I want to discuss the value of their commitment to public service – and the sacrifice that is sometimes attendant to that choice.

Kalpana Chawla, or K.C. as her Columbia crew mates called her, was born in Karnal, India, and received a bachelor of science in aeronautical engineering from Punjab Engineering College in 1982. She knew from her earliest days that she wanted a career in flight and came to the United States and earned a master of science in aerospace engineering from the University Texas in 1984. By 1988, she was awarded a doctorate and began a career of public service working for NASA at our Ames Research Center in California. By 1994, she became an astronaut candidate, and she spent the next decade pursuing her dream of space flight as an astronaut in public service. Before the Columbia flight, she had logged over a month in space on an earlier Shuttle mission.

She recognized early the desire to go to the stars, to serve the public good through government service and scientific advancement. She epitomized our NASA mission goals of understanding and protecting the home planet, exploring the universe and searching for life and inspiring that next generation of explorers.

She was a risk taker, bold beyond the meaning of the word. She lived a life of enormous courage, breaking barriers everywhere she went, from shattering the challenges of immigration to blasting through the sound barrier in high speed jets and ultimately the space shuttle itself. We are so very very proud of her amazing accomplishments.

Kalpana's name in Hindi means "the dream of imagination." We often think of public service as being somehow less than inspirational ... yet K.C.'s life shows us the public service can take us both literally and figuratively streaking across the sky and into space, as the poem says, allowing us to reach out to touch the face of God.

In his remarks at the Columbia astronaut's memorial in Houston, just days after the accident, President Bush put it best when he said of Kalpana and her crew mates, "This cause of exploration and discovery is not an option we choose; it is a desire written in the human heart. We are that part of that creation which seeks to understand all creation. We find the best among us, send them forth into unmapped darkness, and pray they will return. They go in peace for all humankind, and all humankind is in their debt."

We are indeed in the debt of K.C., Kalpana Chawla. She was a special person, and her life stands as a testament to the good we can do in the service of others. Her sacrifice helped advance humankind's knowledge of space and moved us closer to the stars.

Shortly before her mission, K.C. told a reporter that "We do science, we do experiments, but looking at Earth and appreciating the magnificence of it is easily the most touching thing you bring back with you." When I joined President Bush in speaking to the nation at the first memorial service in Houston, one image from the mission—of K.C. standing on the Shuttle's flight deck, joyfully bidding her crewmates to come see the reflection of the entire Earth in the retina of her eye—struck me as the defining image of what this crew was all about.

I said at the time that this is the image that we will remember, and treasure, forever. I hope that each of you experiences an image like that of

transcendent beauty that in an instant puts in perspective the wonders of creation and the essential unity of humanity.

Now let me talk now for a moment or two about another remarkable public servant, Admiral Stan Arthur, the guy I was privileged to know well during my tenure as Navy Secretary.

During his brilliant career, Stan served at all levels in the U.S. Navy, flying over 500 combat missions in Vietnam and winning a record-setting accumulation of 11 Distinguished Flying Crosses, one of our nation's highest honors. He commanded hundreds of thousands of sailors in the Pacific and the Persian Gulf, and most notably led our nation's Naval Forces through the Persian Gulf War in 1990 and 1991, directing the largest Naval force assembled since the Second World War.

He started his career, he would tell you, in 1940, as a five year old boy, the son of a sailor, he could look out from a hill top near his home in California and watch as Navy aircraft flew over Point Loma just outside of San Diego. From that moment on, Stan Arthur felt the need to serve his country through a Navy career of public service.

He had the discipline, the courage, and the determination to follow through on that dream. He ended his career as the Vice Chief of Naval Operations, the second most senior military post in the United States Navy. I worked with him extensively during those difficult days the Navy faced after the Tailhook scandal in the early 1990s, and can tell you no finer public servant has walked the halls of the Pentagon in my experience than Stan Arthur.

But his high visibility and adherence to principles cost him the opportunity to achieve the high honor of serving as the Commander of all Pacific forces. Rather than compromise his principles or integrity, he

withdrew from consideration when his decisions were challenged. In reflecting on the circumstance he observed, "This is not about me. It is about doing your very best in advancement of public goals. And you are to expect nothing in that pursuit. But you are expected to do your best each and every time.

He brought unparalleled levels of honesty and altruism to public service. When I needed advice on how to solve some of the most challenging dilemmas facing the Navy, he was the guy I called on. He was a rock of integrity in a sea of turmoil and self-interest. And he continues to this day his work of public service in retirement through involvement in a range of charitable and nonprofit professional boards.

Kalpana Chawla and Stan Arthur ... interestingly, I don't think I could come up with two people of more different upbringing, physical appearance, or life circumstance that would have brought these two wonderful public servants to the same context. But in the end, most importantly, Kalpana Chawla and Stan Arthur, despite their extraordinary differences, share a great deal in common:

Both dreamed of and attained remarkable success through their chosen careers in public service.

Both pursued their dreams through different challenges, ranging from immigration for Kalpana and the glass ceiling which confronts women ... to the dangers of combat and the long slow rise through Navy ranks for Stan Arthur.

Both made major contributions in their chosen fields of public service, one at NASA and the other in the United States Navy. And each leaves behind a remarkable, truly stunning legacy.

And despite their successes, both were kind, modest people who brought to public service a sense that it was the greater good that mattered, not their individual success.

Each sacrificed greatly to attain their goals and to make their contributions, including K.C.'s tragic death and Stan Arthur's years separated from his family at sea and withdrawal from a crowning achievement in his final years of public service. With great accomplishment, there is often great sacrifice.

Both Stan Arthur and Kalpana Chawla will be remembered for the work they have done in service to the public... again, in the spirit of Father Knoth's words, "as a man and a women for others."

As we think about these two remarkable lives lived for others, my message to you is simple: Think about public service, and the value that it affords.

I think also of a more local story that complements these two in extraordinary ways....and a gent that we all recognize here as a Loyola alumni as well. A good friend of mine, Paul Pastorek, who is here today with his family. He was a year ahead of me in college. He also went to law school here. We served on the student government together, had all kinds of great plans, big dreams....nothing anywhere near what we actually did....He went on to become a very, very successful, extremely well respected attorney here in the city of New Orleans. And along the way, he also made time to be part of the public education programs here in this city and throughout the state, and indeed today he still serves as the President of the state Board of Education for the state of Louisiana. Now he is in his first full time stint in public service having left a very successful law practice in New Orleans to be the General Counsel at NASA. To paraphrase John F.

Kennedy, in the times that we now face at this storied agency we know at NASA that all great challenges must be enterprised equally with dedication and courage. And to be sure the Columbia tragedy tests our resolve, but I could not think of a finer public servant to pursue these challenges and to conquer them than a fellow Loyola alum, my friend Paul Pastorek. Thank you my friend.

So consider public service. It may take a thousand different forms, from NASA and the Navy ... to working for a public defender's office ... to joining the AmeriCorps ... to teaching in the inner city ... to doing research on deadly diseases at the Center for Disease Control. There are countless avenues, some glamorous and very exciting, others – let's face it – that are harder and more thankless. But all of public service will allow you to share a sense that you stand for others – a feeling that is worth quite a bit in your pursuit of a life that matters.

Let me close by relating a conversation that set forth in Robert Bolt's classic story of Sir Thomas Moore in "A Man for all Seasons."

And recall a discussion between an esteemed public servant, Sir Thomas Moore, and Richard Rich, an ambitious young courtier who hoped for a job that would make him wealthy, well-known, and lead to fame on earth. He denigrated Moore's view that teaching in a public school might be a good career, by saying "If I became a teacher, who would ever know?"

Well Sir Thomas Moore responded, "If you became a teacher, Richard, *you* would know. *Your family* would know. *Your students* would know. And *God* would know. Not a bad audience at that."

I will leave you with that thought – that a life in public service provides perhaps the greatest audience of all. It may take on many forms and many paths. It may lead you to surprising and sometimes shockingly

successful outcomes. It may lead you to a life of steady and quiet accomplishment in a wide variety of fields. And it may require extraordinary sacrifice or it may put you on a relatively comfortable path.

There are many outcomes and life is full of those uncertainty and choices. But I can say one thing with certainty: public service will lead you to a life that matters, the goal that we all seek to attain and we certainly all among us here have learned here at Loyola. And in the end, it will provide you a pretty good audience: yourself, your family, your God, and those immediately around you.

So I congratulate all of you on your achievements on this remarkable day. I congratulate your parents and the Loyola faculty who have guided you to this lovely moment...and I wish you all the very best in your pursuit of a life that matters, standing for others.

Thank you and may God Bless you all ...