

NASA: The Future Business

NASA Administrator Charles Bolden addressed the 2013 student delegates with rousing optimism and energy. “I believe in a future where young people like you are going to be the first people setting foot on Mars or leading from Earth a robotic mission to somewhere we’ve never been before,” he said, noting that even in the current budget-cutting climate, NASA’s austere and careful planning process has allowed for major new achievements. The retired Marine Corps Major General and former astronaut ignited the students’ interest in STEM careers—science, technology, engineering and math—by describing some of the science fiction-like missions NASA is undertaking in changing the trajectory of asteroids or exploring Mars, as well as recounting his own unique experiences as an astronaut, working alongside Soviet cosmonauts in the 1980s. Growing up poor in the segregated South, Administrator Bolden credits education as the key factor in his success, pointing out that his mother, a librarian, was “an explorer at heart.” “My parents were both educators. Their field of exploration was not deep space, like mine, it was education. Their vehicles were literature, history, and reading, and their destination was the untapped potential and empowerment of young girls and boys who they believed

could succeed, despite the obstacles of discrimination and poverty that were so prevalent in South Carolina at the time I was growing up. Things have changed, indeed, but our world can still be a tough place. I’m an optimist, though, and I choose to believe the better part of our nature will triumph.” Reflecting on his career in public service, he encouraged the delegates “not to let the opportunity to make a difference in your world pass you by.” He described the space agency’s consistently pioneering work in cooperation with other government entities as a great strength in serving the public good. “The research we do in space will benefit all of us on Earth, and help us make the next great leaps in human destiny,” he said, pointing to NASA’s work in conjunction with NOAA to understand climate change as a prime example. “We’ve got to be smarter than the dinosaurs, or we’ll end up like them.” In closing he summed up his passion for service, “Every single day I go home, I say, ‘We made life better for somebody today’—whether it was through a weather satellite or an unmanned aerial vehicle that identified earthquake damage or alerting people to a tsunami forming or through discovering another planet—we make life better for people every single day.”



*Administrator Bolden with
South Carolina delegates
Christian Ward and William Gaskins*

