

SPRL

This morning I am wearing my hat as backup quarterback
of the University.

I'm delighted to be a part of this dedication for several reasons:

- i) First, the Space Physics Research Laboratory is regarded as one of the real jewels of the University of Michigan... an example of an extremely sophisticated interdisciplinary laboratory performing world-class research of major importance both to the nation and the world...
- ii) Second, because I believe that this represents about the last construction project kicked off while I was Dean of Engineering...and hence it will probably be the last time I will deserve to be invited to your celebrations -- although I hope you will continue to invite me anyway...
- iii) Third, because, I am actually a bit of a "space groupie" myself...

My first job almost 25 years ago was as a research physicist at Los Alamos working on the Rover Project, our nation's effort to develop a nuclear rocket engine to power the first manned mission to Mars...

Incidentally, we managed to develop that rocket engine in the 1960s...indeed we developed and tested nuclear rocket engines considerably larger than those which powered the Saturn 5 boosters in the Apollo program...

Unfortunately, however, when our nation stepped on the moon, it also decided to step, temporarily at least, out of ambitious space exploration projects... and the Rover project...and many subsequent efforts were placed on the back burner in favor of backyard activities such as the Space Shuttle and the Strategic Defense Initiative...

I must note with some irony...and perhaps hope...that some 25 years later, there finally seems to be growing interest in lifting our eyes to the stars once again...

Tuesday's New York Times editorial chiding NASA for its myopia, its preoccupation with trucking and plumbing exercises such as the Space Shuttle and Space Station projects, and encouraging them to develop instead programs

which can rekindle mankind's excitement in exploring
that fascinating universe in which we live in...

i) An array of space-based telescopes

ii) A joint manned mission to Mars with the Soviets...

(Maybe we can dust off the Rover nuclear rocket engine...)

Hence it seems appropriate that the keynote speaker

at this dedication today is someone who will have a major
impact on this nation's space program. Senator Donald

W. Riegle, Jr. ..