

# Shuttle Has Bittersweet Stopover In Houston

BY RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI  
Associated Press

HOUSTON — Waving American flags and space shuttle toys, hundreds of people lined the streets and crowded the airport Wednesday as they watched space shuttle Endeavour touch down in Houston on its way to be permanently displayed in California.

But for many, the experience was bittersweet, tinged with an aftertaste of having been cheated of something they believe should rightfully have been theirs.

"I think that it's the worst thing that they can do, rotten all the way," said 84-year-old Mary Weiss, clinging to her walker just before Endeavour, riding piggy back on a jumbo jet, landed after flying low over Gulf Coast towns, New Orleans and then downtown Houston and its airports.

Space City, partly made famous by Tom Hanks when he uttered the line "Houston, we have a problem" in the movie "Apollo 13," has long tied its fortune to a mix of oil and NASA. Astronauts train in the humid, mosquito-ridden city. Many call it home years after they retire. The Johnson Space Center and an adjacent museum hug Galveston Bay.

Yet Houston's bid for a shuttle was rejected after the White House retired the fleet last summer to spend more time and money on reaching destinations such as asteroids and Mars. Instead, Houston got a replica that used to be displayed at the Kennedy Space Center.

"I think it's a pretty rotten deal, basically," said Scott Rush, 54, of Crystal Beach, Texas, wearing a T-shirt proudly proclaiming that he had witnessed Endeavour's final launch. "The one we're getting is a toy. An

important toy, but a toy nonetheless."

Back-to-back delays in the ferry flight resulted in one day being cut from the Houston visit. But Wednesday dawned under bright sunshine and cooler-than-normal temperatures, drawing hundreds of excited people, many of whom brought children or grandchildren along.

After landing, the Endeavour rolled slowly in front of the cheering crowd. It circled and preened like a model on the catwalk, giving awed spectators an opportunity to take pictures from a variety of angles.

"I want to go on it," said 3-year-old Joshua Lee as he headed to the landing area with his mother and grandmother.

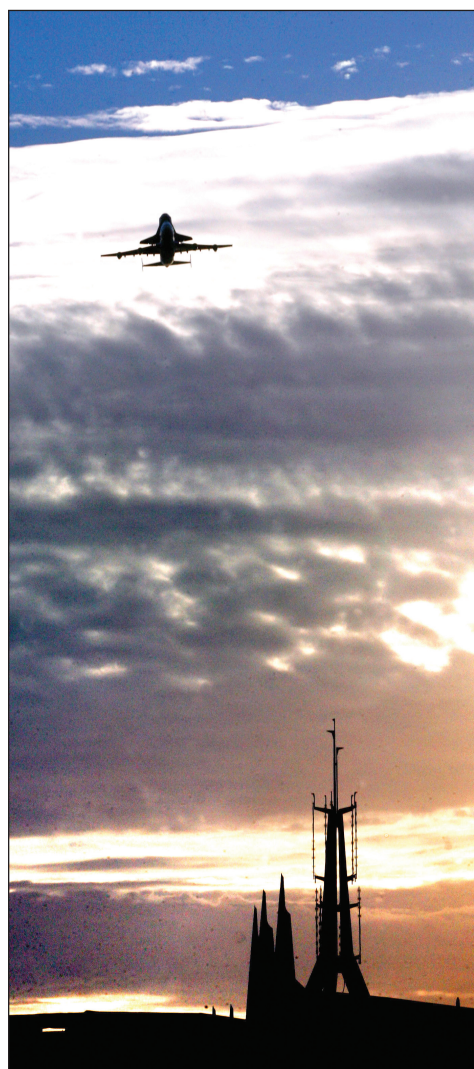
Joshua's mother, Jacqueline Lee of Houston, viewed the landing as an educational opportunity she had to share with her son.

"It's history in the making and it probably will be the end and I don't know if he'll get to see this again," Lee said. "I wish we were able to rally enough to have it stay here in Texas since we've had a major input in all the history of NASA."

NASA still plays a large role in Houston, and astronaut Clayton Anderson, who lived on the International Space Station from June to November 2007, encouraged people to focus on a new era of space exploration.

"The shuttles are a wonderful legacy, a huge part of Houston, but now it's time to look to the future," said Anderson, who lives in the Houston suburb of League City.

Earlier Wednesday, hundreds gathered in Cape Canaveral, Fla., to bid Endeavour farewell. The shuttle will spend the night in Houston before continuing its journey to Los Angeles International Airport, where it's scheduled to land Friday.



JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL/MCT  
Perched atop a modified Boeing 747, space shuttle Endeavour is seen passing over the spires of Space Mountain at sunrise Wednesday in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Fla., en route to Houston, the first leg of a two-day trek to California.

# Jobs Bill For Veterans Bogs Down In Senate

BY KEVIN FREKING  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans blocked legislation Wednesday that would have established a \$1 billion jobs program putting veterans back to work tending to the country's federal lands and bolstering local police and fire departments.

Republicans said the spending authorized in the bill violated limits that Congress agreed to last year. Democrats fell two votes shy of the 60-vote majority needed to waive the objection, forcing the legislation back to committee.

Supporters loosely modeled their proposal after the President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps used during the Great Depression to put people to work planting trees, building parks and constructing dams. They said the latest monthly jobs report, showing a nearly 11 percent unemployment rate for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan, merited action from Congress.

Democratic lawmakers turned to the legislation shortly before they'll adjourn for the final weeks of this year's election campaigns. The bill had little chance of passing the House this Congress, but it still allowed senators to appeal to a key voting bloc.

"(With) a need so great as unemployed veterans, this is not the time to draw a technical line on the budget," said Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson of Florida, the bill's lead sponsor, who faces a competitive re-election battle.

Republicans said the effort to help veterans was noble, but the bill was flawed nevertheless.

Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma said the federal government already has six job-training programs for veterans and there is no way to know how well they are working. He ar-

gued that making progress on the country's debt was the best way to help veterans in the long-term.

"We ought to do nothing now that makes the problem worse for our kids and grandkids," Coburn said.

Democratic officials did not have an estimate for how many veterans would be hired as a result of the legislation. Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., said much would depend upon the number of applicants. She noted that more than 720,000 veterans are unemployed across the nation, including 220,000 veterans who have served since the Sept. 11, 2011, terrorist attacks. She said putting veterans back to work was the cost of war.

"Instead of meeting us halfway, we have been met with resistance. Instead of saying yes to the nearly 1 million unemployed veterans, it seems some on the other side have spent the last week and a half seeking any way to say no," Murray said.

The advocacy group Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America denounced the vote.

"This bill was smart bipartisan policy that would put veterans back into service for their communities as policemen, firefighters and first responders," the group's founder and chief executive, Paul Rieckhoff, said in statement. "The result of today's vote creates tremendous doubt that this Congress will be able to pass any additional veterans legislation in 2012. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans should not have to wait until 2013 for critical support from Congress."

A handful of Republicans joined with Democrats in voting to waive the objection to the bill: Sen. Scott Brown of Massachusetts, Dean Heller of Nevada, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska and Maine's Susan Collins and Olympia Snowe. Brown and Heller are also in tough re-election contests.

# Honor

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through Northeast Community College in Norfolk, Neb. He plans to use those credits when he attends Colorado School of Mines for engineering.

Bloomfield's strong curriculum, one-to-one laptops and outside learning opportunities have paid off on the ACT college-entrance exam, he said.

"My class has an average ACT of 26 (out of a perfect 36), and three or four of us scored above a 30 ACT," he said. "I think we are prepared so well for college and beyond. We have students who come back and say they get straight A's in college because of what they learned here."

Bloomfield's excellence extends throughout the system, Burgerhoff said.

"We have always had a strong school, but this is one of the best classes in a long time," he said. "But it's not just the seniors. We have a real exceptional group of students in the school system."

Burgerhoff points to Bloomfield's strong administration, along with the strong teaching staff and guidance counseling, as keys to success.

"We had Mrs. (Kim) Lingenfelter as principal, and she is now superintendent at Neligh. She did a really good job here at Bloomfield. She pushed us all so that we tried really hard," he said. "And now, Mr. Klunender has picked up where Mrs. Lingenfelter left off."

Bloomfield students aren't resting on their laurels after receiving the Blue Ribbon honors, Burgerhoff said.

"With this award, you feel a great sense of pride. It's pretty cool for us," he said. "There is a sense of accomplishment that makes you try harder. You want to get there again."

Wilken considers the Blue Ribbon a highlight of his 40-year teaching and coaching career, all spent at Bloomfield.

"I started here, and I would like to finish here," he said. "This school and this (Blue Ribbon) award are real personal to me."

That sense of pride is felt throughout the Bloomfield school system.

Superintendent Bob Marks, who has served both Bloomfield and Wausa for the past five years, said the Blue Ribbon designation rewards all the behind-the-scenes work.

"We never rest after a good year. We are continually evaluating and

planning for the future," he said. "We laugh and cry with our students, parents and staff. We celebrate our accomplishments, whether it is with a teacher gaining recognition, a student going beyond exceptional, or a student struggling to get off the 'down and failing' list."

Science teacher Robbin Beckmann points to the importance of the school motto "Bee Responsible," which plays off the Bees school mascot.

Staff members pride themselves on helping students become responsible adults and reach their full potential, Beckmann said.

In that respect, faculty members make themselves available to students at any time, she said. "Our students are our future, and we want them to know how important they are to us and to our community."

BHS seniors Dominique Swanson, Grace Carhart, Autumn Luger and Callen Koester see the Blue Ribbon award as a great end to their high school careers but also a way of leaving a legacy.

The Blue Ribbon honor provides a reward for years of struggle and hard work, Swanson said.

"It gave us all a strong sense of accomplishment because it was finally clear to us why we had been pushed so hard all these years," she said. "It made me reflect on all the times I complained and questioned why we had to do certain things, and frankly, made me eat my words. It truly did pay off."

The Bloomfield Community Schools (BCS) show how to balance all aspects of life, Swanson said.

"I could not be more proud to be apart of the Bloomfield school system, because we are the definition of what a fun, yet hard-working school is," she said. "Success at BCS, that's what we're all about."

The Blue Ribbon shows small schools — Bloomfield enrolls about 250 in grades K-12 — can excel na-

tionally, Carhart said.

"As a senior at Bloomfield High, it is a privilege for me to attend this school," she said. "I've always known that Bloomfield is tough. We have a hard curriculum and a lot of competition, which has led to our many achievements throughout the years."

BHS instructors respond to students' needs, Luger said. "We feel comfortable raising questions or asking for help in nearly every class," she said.

But school is more than classes, and Bloomfield students seek to become well rounded through activities, Luger said. "All students are urged to take advantage of our options and to get involved in as much as possible," she said.

Koester also sees high school and the Blue Ribbon "as a testament to our character."

"We believe putting education first is just one step in becoming responsible citizens, dedicated to making a better future for tomorrow," Koester added.

School board members Jason Hefner, Kristi Hauger and Kieth Koertje said the Blue Ribbon Award comes as a result of hard work and dedication.

Hefner, the board president, said he attended Bloomfield for his K-12 education and has found it impacting his entire life.

"This prestigious award honors some of the same teachers that taught me over 20 years ago," he said. "Our experienced teachers, along with the new teachers that have been implemented in over the last few years, have worked together and done a great job in earning this award."

For Koertje, the Blue Ribbon Award reaffirms the Bloomfield schools are a good investment.

"It shows that small schools our size have presence in the education of our students," he said. "In a small community, it makes patrons realize

their tax dollars are going to a quality school."

Hauger commended the teaching staff for instilling high standards in students. "After all, our young people are the future leaders of our schools, churches and communities," she said.

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