

Long-time NASA Official to Speak at UMaine Friday; Will Discuss State of the U.S. Space Program

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Contact: Joe Carr at (207) 581-3571

ORONO -- Aaron Cohen, a long-time NASA administrator who managed the early design and development of the space shuttle, will visit the University of Maine on Friday Oct. 21, as the guest of his friend and former colleague, UMaine President Robert Kennedy. Cohen will present a public talk at 4 p.m. in the Arthur St. John Hill Auditorium, located in UMaine's Engineering and Science Research Center (attached to Barrows Hall).

Cohen worked at NASA from 1962 through 1992. During the Apollo program, he served as manager of the Command and Service Module, among other significant roles that were critical to the success of all six lunar landings. In 1972, he was named Space Shuttle Orbiter Project Manager, a position that gave him key responsibilities in the earliest stages of the space shuttle program. By 1986, Cohen had become Johnson Space Center Director, in charge of approximately 3,600 NASA employees and 14,000 contractor employees. After his 1992 retirement from NASA, Cohen returned to his alma mater, Texas A&M University, as Zachary Professor of Engineering. That's where he met Kennedy, who was vice president for research at Texas A&M.

"Aaron is one of the key behind-the-scenes figures in the history of the U.S. space program," Kennedy says. "He played an important role in helping move the space program through its various stages of development over three decades, as manned space travel became more routine and more scientifically significant. His perspectives on the current state of the space program are timely and are informed by an historical perspective that can be matched by very few people."

Cohen plans to discuss "Apollo 13 and the Space Shuttle," in the context of recent news related to NASA. A new exploration initiative to the Moon and Mars is planned, and NASA Administrator Michael Griffin recently characterized the shuttle and the International space station as "mistakes."

"It is apparent that the U.S. space program is at a crossroads, and it will be interesting to see how events transpire over the coming months," Kennedy says. "Aaron is certain to have interesting insights, and I look forward to hearing what he has to say."