

ENCOUNTER SPACE

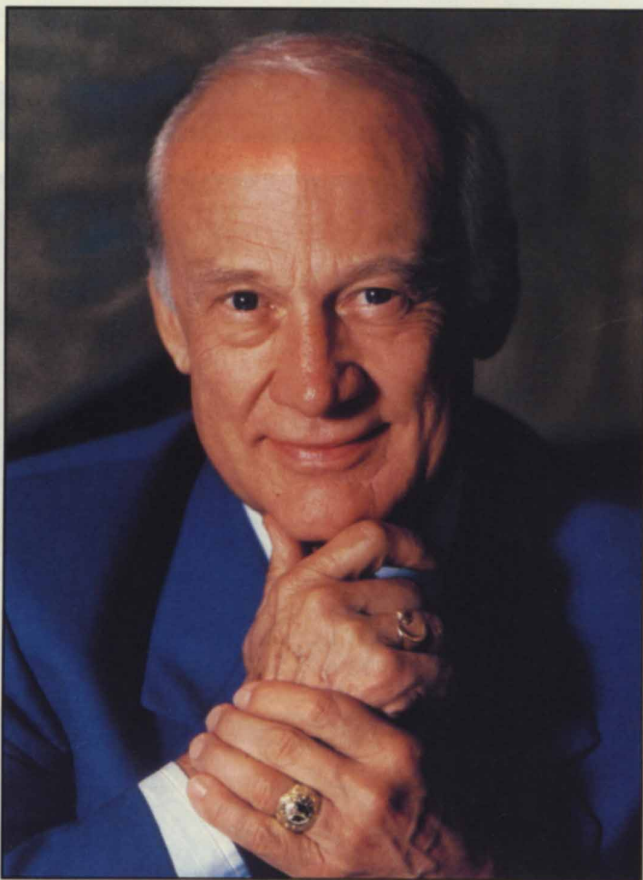
Thirty-five years ago, a young American president stood before the Congress and called upon the nation to "take a clearly leading role in space achievement which in many ways may hold the key to our future on Earth." Kennedy opened a pathway to the stars with his historic words on 25 May 1961: "This Nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth."

In just eight years we realized the vision. Yet after the triumph of landing Neil and myself on the Moon, the program waned. It was as if Ferdinand and Isabella had burned the ships after Columbus returned from the New World.

When I stood on the Moon in 1969, I believed, like John Kennedy, that the Apollo program would be "important for the long-range exploration of space." I would never have imagined that we would give up our New World so willingly.

Twenty-seven years later we appear to have hit an all-time low. When NSS contacted each of the presidential candidates to learn their policies on space earlier this year, not one candidate responded with a policy statement and no republican candidate even had an opinion on the future of space exploration.

We at the NSS believe that Kennedy was right and that space does hold the key to our future on Earth. There have been mistakes. We have



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spent vast sums on individual programs with no clear vision of our future as a spacefaring nation. We have procrastinated too long.

It is 35 years since Kennedy challenged us to embrace space. If we shrink from the challenge now we will

fall behind others who heed the call and aspire to the prize. NASA and the White House need to define a clear, incremental set of goals for space exploration over the next 10–20 years.

Let's consider seriously the tenet that humans will live on Mars in the next century. What must we achieve in terms of access to space and space habitability and functionality—at the space station and a lunar outpost—to make human Mars missions a reality?

In this special issue of *Ad Astra* you will read how it can be done. Concerned at the current political indifference to the exploration and exploitation of space, and the stagnation of our national space agenda, the National Space Society invited twelve renowned experts in space matters to share their visions of how, step by step, we can make our way to the stars. Learn how exciting our future could be and find out how you can help to transform us into a spacefaring civilization.

Ad Astra! ★

Buzz Aldrin is Chairman of the Board of Directors of the NSS.