

A Tribute to James M. Beggs

by Academy Fellow, Sean O'Keefe

In April the Academy lost James Beggs, one of its stalwart Fellows who had been recruited to our organization by one of the Academy Founders, James Webb. A 1947 Naval Academy graduate and nearly a decade of experience in the highly disciplined submarine community "silent service," Jim Beggs honed his skills in industry at Westinghouse before he was recruited to NASA by Webb to serve as his Associate Administrator for Advanced Research Technology during the peak of the Apollo era. He subsequently served as Deputy Secretary of Transportation, and a few years back to industry working before his appointment as the sixth NASA Administrator at the beginning of the space shuttle era in the Reagan Administration.

During his time leading the space agency he successfully initiated the President's program to develop a multi-national in-space collaborative research project that ultimately became what now know as the International Space Station. The objective was to leverage the contributions of the global scientific and engineering community to greatest advantage for humankind. The shuttle program which matured during his tenure was ultimately purposed for the transportation and assembly of the modules of the ISS specifically designed to be transported in the shuttle cargo bay. Concurrently, he championed the space science program to design, develop and assemble the Hubble Space Telescope.

A chapter of his private sector experience was spent working for the eccentric and brilliant aerospace industry innovator Howard Hughes. Among his many responsibilities, Beggs considered one his most important was to arrange for the transfer of the Hughes collection of aircraft to the National Air and Space Museum. The array of aerospace innovations on display there are testimonial to the creativity of and imagination of Howard Hughes and the ingenuity of Jim Beggs to make it accessible.

His contributions as a Fellow of the Academy spanned the decades as he shared his unique perspective drawn from rich experiences that Beggs largely attributed to the leadership and management lessons he learned from James Webb. A much admired leader at NASA, and the aerospace community, we celebrate the memory of James Beggs as a legacy of the Academy's dedication to exemplary public service.