

American Astronomical Society Press Advisory

For immediate release.

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This morning, the President of the American Astronomical Society, Dr. Catherine A. Pilachowski, who holds the Kirkwood Chair in Astronomy at Indiana University Bloomington, sent the following letter of condolence to Mr. Sean O'Keefe, the NASA Administrator in light of the space shuttle tragedy this weekend.

Dear Administrator O'Keefe,

I write on behalf of the members of the American Astronomical Society to express our extreme grief over the loss of the Columbia crew this Saturday.

Our hearts go out to the families of the astronauts who have given their lives in the pursuit of scientific knowledge and human achievement. Through the manned space flight program, technological hurdles to living in space are being overcome and scientific research is being facilitated.

The space shuttle Columbia played an important role supporting astronomical research. On July 23, 1999 Columbia successfully carried the Chandra X-Ray Observatory (STS-93), one of NASA's Great Observatories into orbit and also carried out a servicing mission on the Hubble Space Telescope in March, 2002 (STS-109). As we carry out scientific research with these orbiting telescopes, we always remember that they were placed into orbit and repaired by men and women willing to risk their lives to support science.

We stand united with NASA in this time of sorrow and offer whatever services we can provide along with our heartfelt grief.

Sincerely,

Catherine A. Pilachowski
President, American Astronomical Society

Images of the Shuttle Columbia launching the Chandra X-Ray Observatory may be found at:

<http://chandra.harvard.edu/resources/ppt/deployment/index.html>

Images of the Shuttle Columbia during the HST 3B servicing mission may be found at:

<http://sm3b.gsfc.nasa.gov/gallery/images/latest.html>