

"We're winning the race with Russia..."

University of Alabama in Huntsville
saturn history
1962

Even when Congress is not in session, Oklahoma's senior Senator, Robert S. Kerr, is a busy man. Speeches, meetings with constituents, public appearances and other commitments frequently keep him on the move seven days a week.

And not only in his home state. Because he has become a national figure, Kerr is much in demand as a political adviser and speaker in other states. Recently, U. S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT called him "one of the most influential Senate Democrats."

As chairman of the Aeronautical and Space Sciences committee of the Senate, Kerr maintains a close watch on the nation's space program.

When CHALLENGE caught up with him a few weeks ago, the Senator was in Kansas City, Missouri, to give a speech. He gave CHALLENGE his views on the state-of-the-space-program in an early morning interview.

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"We're winning the race with Russia — space-wise defense-wise, production-wise and in every other decisive element," Kerr declared. "And if we're behind in developing boosters, we won't stay behind for long."

"Remember," he continued, "we didn't build the first jet engine. We were not the first to discover power steam. And Orville Wright wasn't the first man to fly an airplane. But we did take these things and show the world that we were second to none in developing them and using them."

Must Expect Casualties

Asked if we would reach the moon before the Russians, Kerr answered with a confident "yes" but warned that we must expect some casualties: "We do not contemplate carrying our program through without mechanical or human casualties. The American people are entitled to know

our failures as well as our successes and I'm sure the people will bear up with as much fortitude in the face of failure as they have pride when we succeed. We will have casualties but they won't deter us from our purpose. After all, the railroads still lose people and they have been operating for more than 100 years."

Is there sufficient public understanding and support of the space program now?, Kerr was asked. "Yes sir," he said, "there's as much support from those who don't understand the program as those who do. I'll tell about something that happened to me to show you what I mean."

"Last year when Alan Shepherd was making his flight," the Senator said, "my driver and I were traveling along a road in Oklahoma listening to the radio account of the flight. A storm came up and we stopped at a roadside restaurant. There were about 25 people in there and they were all listening to the account of Shepherd's recovery from the ocean. One old fellow broke the hushed silence and said, 'Do you know that it's costing us \$40 million to do this — it's a waste of money.' The others gave him disapproving looks and one spoke up and replied, 'Suppose it did cost \$40 million — we sure whomped hell out of 'em, didn't we.'"

"Now this fellow who defended the program didn't really understand it but the important thing is that he knew it was great and that his country had scored — and the others agreed with him," Kerr added.

Need For Good Management

The Senator was then asked, do you think it will be necessary to call on this excellent public support to get additional money appropriated to speed the space program? "No," he said, "I don't think we'll need appropriations that are more than presently planned, but we need to have careful management and implementation of the pro-

grams on the part of government and business in order to succeed in our goals.

"And these are cooperative goals," Kerr stresses. "There is complete coordination and cooperation among the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the Department of Defense, and the Atomic Energy Commission. It is the most effective cooperation that I know of among existing government agencies whose programs and objectives have as much in common. I have abundant confidence in Mr. Webb (NASA administrator). He has his feet on the ground and knows his problems and what he has to do to solve them as well as any man in Washington."

Do you foresee an increased military role in space? "The primary purpose of our space program is peaceful," Kerr emphasized. "Possibly there will be increased use of space by the military but only if it's necessary for our national security. The excellent cooperation I mentioned is keeping our military people up to date with new developments."

Kerr added that he thought the U.S. faces no problem in financing future space projects. "This country is able and will continue to be able to finance its requirements for space as well as security and defense."

"More Trained Brains"

Asked to comment on the main problems facing the aerospace industry, Kerr summed up the central one in the phrase — "more trained brains." However, he emphasized that the problem was more one of quality than quantity. "The problem is not in numbers but in quality," he said, "and finding those who have the right blend of training for the complex space field so that our vehicles can operate and navigate properly and return safely. We want to be sure that our astronaut will be able to use the return ticket

he took with him.

"I doubt," he continued, "if there are two dozen people with Ph.D's in the nation who have the exact training necessary for the space program."

What about the future, he was asked. What kinds of things will we be doing twenty years from now, in 1982?

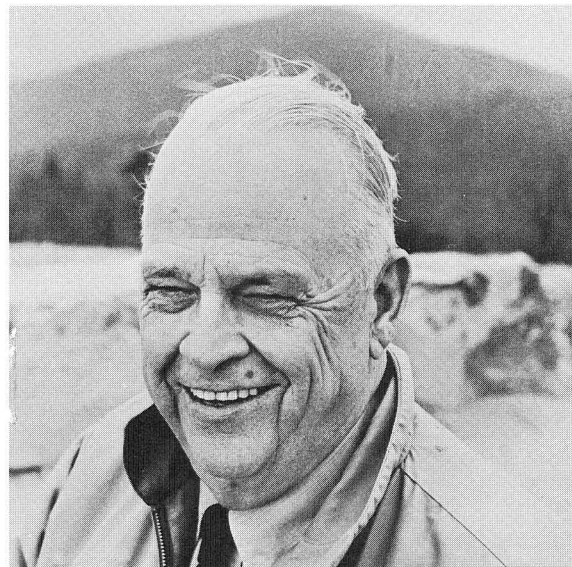
"I can't predict that," Kerr said. "It's beyond what either the most learned scientist or the most imaginative person could indicate. I'm just as unable to do that as Columbus would have been able to predict the future of the new world when he returned to Europe after his first voyage."

"Nineteen years ago, in 1943, when I was governor of Oklahoma, I had a meeting with the governors of some neighboring states to discuss cooperation on mutual problems. After the meeting, we were sitting outside discussing what might happen in the future. The moon was out and I looked up at it and said, 'See that moon up yonder — I expect to live long enough to see us get there and back.' This was too much for one of the men in the group, who was a rugged old fella and a man of few words. He just looked at me, said 'hellll' and went to bed."

"My judgement," Kerr went on, "of what the future holds now — if I had words to express it — would be much more incredible to us than getting to the moon was to my friend twenty years ago."

Dramatic Effort

In finishing, the Senator had a few words for employees of the Missile and Space Division. "Tell your employees," he said, "that they are engaged in one of the most exciting and dramatic efforts in human history, an effort for themselves, their industry and their country. It is an effort of great significance to their generation and even greater significance to their children and future generations."



Kerr relaxes on Oklahoma ranch

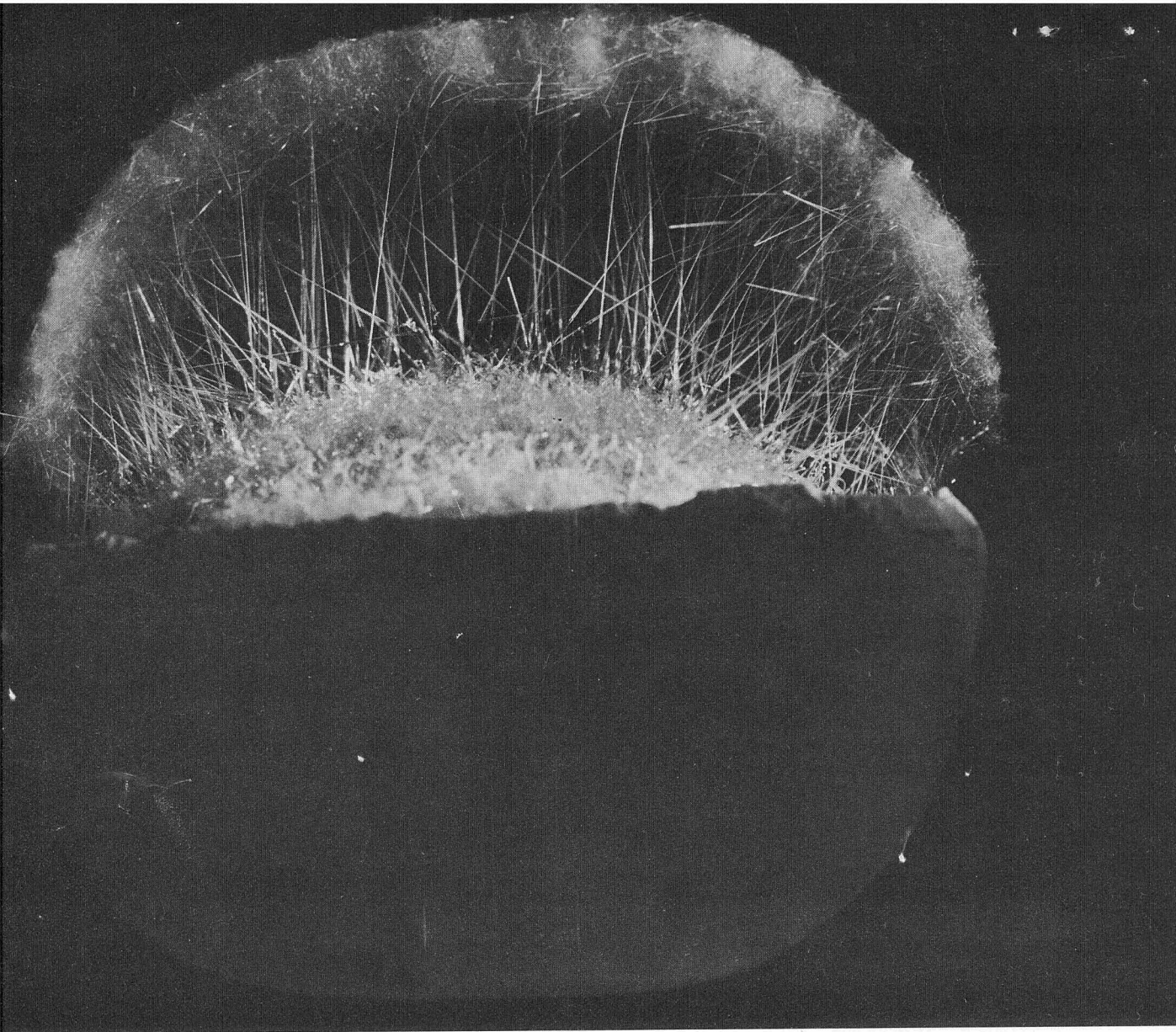
SENATOR KERR TALKS

ABOUT SPACE

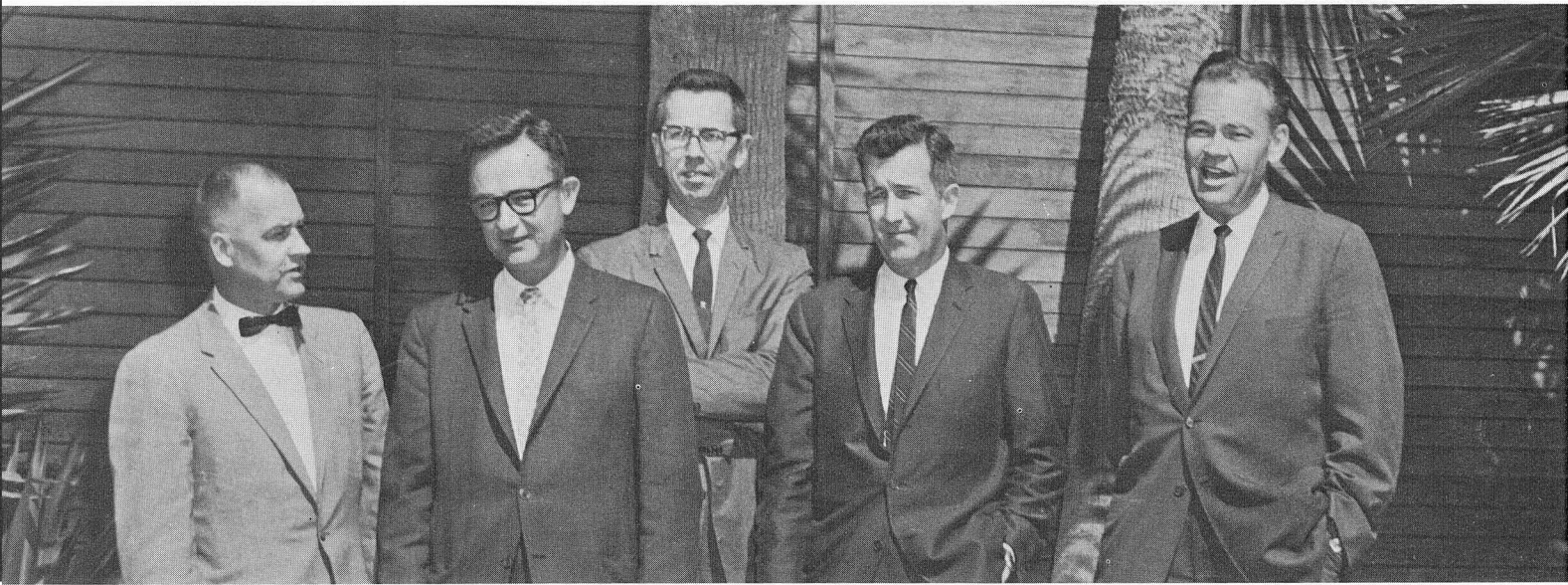
GE
Challenge
Winter (Dec) 1962



Astronauts Alan Shepherd, John Glenn and Virgil Grissom meet the Senator.



Howard Grantz, WAFS manager, heads up the oldest GE-MSD group at Vandenberg. He's shown here with his secretary, Elaine Thomas.



Caught in the California sun — all from Pacific Flight Test Engineering and from l to r: Charles Eastwood, John Smith, Bill Bobo, Don Romer, and Orvil Jones.

ALUMINA WHISKER RESEARCH



ASPD's Lew Binegar, left, and Walt Chapman talk things over. ASPD's group is the latest GE-MSD to set up operations at Vandenberg.