Reagan mourns loss of the crew

President Reagan, the following is the text of President Reagan's speech, delivered in the aftermath of the Challenger accident:

Ladies and gentlemen, I plan to speak to you tonight at 8:30 p.m. on the state of the Union. But the events of earlier today have led me to change that plan.

Today is a day for mourning and remembrance. Nancy and I am pained to the core for the tragedy of the shuttle Challenger. We know that our tears, like so many others, will not ease the pain and suffering of those who lost loved ones.

Nancy and I have been doing just that. I have been doing just that. and perhaps we have forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle Challenger, seven heroes, to fly their mission, to serve and to discover its truths. They will serve all of us.

And perhaps we have forgotten the courage it took for the crew of the shuttle Challenger, seven: we cannot bear as you do. We mourn seven heroes: Michael J. Smith, Dick Scobee, Judith Resnick, Ronald McNair, Ellison S. Onizuka, Gregory Jarvis, and Christa McAuliffe.

On this day 390 years ago the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, Massachusetts. In his lifetime, the great explorer Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain, "saw the world as a challenge and I'll meet it with joy." He had a hunger to explore the unknown and discover its truths. They served all of us.

We have space and to wonder in this century. It is hard to dazzle us. But for 25 years the United States space program has been doing just that. We have grown used to the idea of space, and perhaps we forget that we have only just begun. We are still pioneers. They, the members of the Challenger crew, were pioneers.

And I want to say something to the schoolchildren of America who were watching the live coverage of the shuttle's takeoff. I know it is hard to understand, but sometimes painful things like this happen. It is all part of a process of exploration and discovery. It is all part of taking a chance to expand man's horizons.

The future doesn't belong to the faint-hearted. It belongs to the brave. The Challenger crew was putting us into the future, and we will continue to follow it. I have always had great faith in and respect for our space program, and what happened today does nothing to diminish it. We do not hide our space program. We do not keep secrets and cover things up. We do it all in public. That's the way freedom is, and we wouldn't change it for a minute.

We will continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights, and more shuttle crews, and yes, more astronauts, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here. Our hopes and our journeys continue.

I want to add that I wish I could talk to every man and woman who works for NASA and who worked on this mission and tell them, "Your dedication and professionalism have moved and impressed us for decades and we know of your anguish. We share it, too."

There is a coincidence today. On this day 400 years ago the great explorer Sir Francis Drake died aboard ship off the coast of Panama. In his lifetime, the great frontiers were the oceans, and a historian once said, "He lived as the sea, died on it, and was buried in it." And today we can say of the Challenger crew, their dedication was like Drake's — complete.

The crew of the space shuttle Challenger honored us by the manner in which they lived their lives. We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, this morning as they prepared for their journey and waved goodbye and slipped the surly bonds of earth to touch the face of God.

Thank you.