

White House, NASA defend Bolden's comments

Tuesday, July 06, 2010

The White House and NASA defended the space agency chief's remarks to Arabic news network Al-Jazeera about one of his "foremost" tasks being to reach out to the Muslim world.

Bolden's remarks caused a stir among right-wing commentators as they were picked up across the Internet.

"When I became the NASA administrator, (President Obama) charged me with three things," Bolden said in the interview which aired last week. "One, he wanted me to help re-inspire children to want to get into science and math; he wanted me to expand our international relationships; and third, and perhaps foremost, he wanted me to find a way to reach out to the Muslim world and engage much more with dominantly Muslim nations to help them feel good about their historic contribution to science, math and engineering."

White House spokeswoman Moira Mack on Tuesday said the president's intention is collaboration — and that was the message being conveyed. NASA spokesman Bob Jacobs also defended Bolden's comments.

"NASA is focused on its core mission of exploration, from pushing the boundaries of known space to breakthrough innovations in science and technology here at home," Jacobs wrote in an e-mail. "Without question, that work includes collaboration with other nations who share our goals. While space exploration may have once been a global competition, it is now a global collaboration. It is in this vein that Administrator Bolden has engaged with his colleagues around the world, to bring the best minds and ideas together to expand our common knowledge and capabilities."

-By Michelle Spitzer