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Contact: (703) 808-5050

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NRO Selects the 2014 Class of Pioneers

Ms. Betty Sapp, Director of the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), has selected Mr. Thomas C. "Chris" Fitzsimmons and Mr. John Stavlo as the 2014 Pioneers of National Reconnaissance. The NRO honors as Pioneers those individuals who have made significant and lasting contributions to the discipline of national reconnaissance. Mr. Frank Calvelli, Principal Deputy Director of the NRO, inducted Mr. Fitzsimmons and Mr. Stavlo during a ceremony on Wednesday, February 18, 2015, at NRO headquarters in Chantilly, Va. The Honorable James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, was the featured speaker at this year's event.

Mr. Fitzsimmons pioneered the development, production, and test of lightweight optical and structural components. His efforts resulted in the elimination of significant weight from the large aperture, heavy optical subsystem used in the nation's electro-optical (EO) imagery reconnaissance satellites, with no reduction in image quality. The technological breakthroughs and processes he pioneered are key enablers for NRO's high-resolution EO collection capabilities, which operate today.

Mr. Stavlo pioneered the design and implementation of a first-of-a-kind precision pointing and tracking control system. To overcome the challenge of extending conventional attitude control concepts and development tools, he devised an innovative solution involving simulations with high-fidelity dynamic models and test beds with engineering model hardware operating in a closed loop mode. Mr. Stavlo's design and techniques represent a quantum leap in signals intelligence collection sensitivity.

As Pioneers of National Reconnaissance, Mr. Fitzsimmons and Mr. Stavlo are classic examples of leading engineering minds in the Intelligence Community. Both individuals faced and overcame technical challenges with their pioneering innovations that led to superior intelligence collection from space. Building upon their foundation, today's NRO strives to provide a global perspective to satisfy user needs. Over the past 15 years, the NRO has recognized 91 pioneers. Designation as a Pioneer of National Reconnaissance is the highest honor in the field.

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The NRO is a joint Department of Defense-Intelligence Community organization responsible for developing, launching, and operating America's intelligence satellites to meet the national security needs of our nation.