

Mr. Gehman's panel will also examine the *Columbia* wreckage, and come to its own conclusions about what happened. Mr. O'Keefe described Mr. Gehman as "well-versed in understanding exactly how to look at the forensics in these cases and coming up with the causal effects of what could occur."

Joining Mr. Gehman on the commission are four military officers and two federal aviation safety officials.

Officials used horses and four-wheel-drive vehicles to find and recover the shuttle pieces.

Divers were being called in to search the floor of Toledo Blend Reservoir, on the Texas-Louisiana line, for a car-sized piece seen slamming into the water.

Some body parts from the seven-member astronaut crew have been recovered and are being sent to a military morgue in Dover Air Force Base in Delaware.

*Columbia* came apart 61 km over Texas while it was streaking at more than 19 500 km/h toward the Kennedy Space Center. A long vapour trail across the sky marked the rain of debris.