Houston’s New Space Lab Draws Mixed Reaction

By SHIRLEY JONES

“Rice is all right, but it has made no contribution ... that compares with other universities,” said one anonymous space scientist who had hoped that the manned-space-flight program would be located somewhere other than Houston.

“The present Space Task Group laboratory at Langley Field in Virginia meets all the requirements—and the physical plant is already there,” commented another.

THESE WERE among the mixed reactions to the decision to locate the new space lab on Rice-donated land in Houston.

It was generally agreed, however, that Houston rated high in such important criteria as waterway facilities, rail and air links, favorable climate, and proximity to technical and university personnel.

Washington did not ignore the fact that Houston is within the home district of Representative Albert Thomas, chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee—which controls the budget of the Federal space program. Representative Thomas acknowledged that the $60 million needed to build the new facilities will be “only a down payment on its eventual cost.”

AN EDITORIAL in a Northern newspaper conceded: “This time we can’t blame the network of Texas congressmen or their political power. This time we can blame the way they do things down in Texas. The truth is that in Texas, they not only talk big. They think big. They do big.”