

NASA Presents New Astronaut Class at Johnson Space Center

by Kesha Rogers

June 7—NASA introduced twelve new astronauts today at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. This was a record year in the history of NASA: The twelve astronauts, five of whom are women, were selected out of a candidate pool of over 18,000 applicants, more applicants than ever before. The astronauts will begin training for missions into Earth orbit and deep space. The astronaut class of 2017 was the 22nd class of American space flight trainees since 1959.

I attended this very inspiring event, reporting for *21st Century Science & Technology*. There to bring greetings from Washington on behalf of President Donald Trump and the White House, was Vice President Mike Pence. The Vice President joined NASA leaders—including acting administrator Robert Lightfoot and director of Houston flight operations Brian Kelly—in announcing the new astronauts. Several elected officials attended, including Senator Ted Cruz, Congressman Lamar Smith, Congressman Jim Bridenstine, and Texas Governor Greg Abbott. Many other local officials and others representing congressional offices were also present. The presentation of the as-

tronauts took place inside Johnson Space Center's Space Vehicle Mockup Facility, in front of a full-scale engineering model of NASA's Orion spacecraft.

The full text of the Vice President's speech can be found at NASA.gov. He said in part,

To the members of this new class of American astronauts, I say congratulations. . . . As American astronauts, you may yet return our nation to the Moon. You may be the first to travel to Mars. You may have experiences that we can only imagine.

Vice President Pence made a promise that—

NASA will have the resources and support you need to continue to make history, to push the boundary of human knowledge, and to advance American leadership to the boundless frontier of space.

Under President Donald Trump, America will lead in space once again, and the world will follow.



NASA/Robert Markowitz

The 2017 NASA Astronaut Class.

Pence referenced President Trump’s relaunching of a National Space Council after more than two decades, which the Vice President will chair. Pence said, “America needs a national space council once again,” and explained that—

Twice before in our nation’s history, our nation has had a federal body charged with advising the President on national policy and strategy for space. It was under the council’s watch that America put the first man in outer space, and put a man on the Moon in less than a decade between. . . . Our national space council will re-energize the pioneering spirit of America in Space. . . . We must reorient our civilian space program toward deep space exploration, and provide the capabilities for America to maintain a constant presence in low Earth orbit and beyond.

He referred to increased collaboration with commercial space industry, stating,

The American spirit is as limitless as space itself, and by tapping the bottomless well of American innovation through increased collaboration with commercial space industries, we can seize opportunities that will benefit our nation and our people for generations to come.

Pence summoned the inspiration of President John F. Kennedy when he said,

I know the path you have chosen is hard. But as President John F. Kennedy said not far from here in 1962, we do not choose to do these things “because they are easy,” but rather “because they are hard. . . . because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone,” and that challenge is “one which we intend to win.”

Vice President Pence affirmed, “And we will win.” He later continued,

Once again we reach out our hands to touch the heavens, and raise our heads to gaze with wonder at the stars—and the heroes that have courage to explore them. And you twelve will be part of our vanguard. You are true heroes—true patriots—

and true trailblazers in the best American tradition.

Following the ceremony, I joined other members of the media for one-on-one discussion with NASA representatives speaking on behalf of NASA’s Commercial Crew Program, Orion spacecraft, and the International Space Station (ISS). There was also a Q&A session with the astronauts. Some very exciting discoveries are being made in deep space exploration, and with ISS.

The Necessary Economic Platform

There is still no mention of a choice for NASA administrator, and the emphasis on commercial space flight as a means of cutting corners and saving money, shows how desperately we require a national space mission and the vision that inspired the nation and the world under President John F. Kennedy.

This is a moment in our nation’s history in which Americans should be very proud of the great potential being unleashed. But we have to harness that potential. We will only achieve our goal of returning America to greatness in space through increased international cooperation, including collaborating with China, as well as with our other international partners.

We must revive our national mission in space exploration—one that will contribute to the economic progress of our nation and all nations around the world, while providing the highest level of responsibility for the safety and the lives of our astronauts, as they venture out to make new discoveries.

The first step toward the implementation of our national mission in space is an economic recovery program for the United States that will immediately implement Lyndon LaRouche’s [Four Laws](#), starting with the reinstatement of Glass-Steagall, followed by the implementation of a National Credit system. We need immediate investment in a national infrastructure platform, including a space platform for the development of new technologies and new resources, that will advance the whole of human knowledge, and allow us to increase the standard of living of every person on Earth. There can be no shortcuts to achieving our national goal of restoring America’s leadership in space. We can no longer allow failure as an option in our commitment to space.

As a NASA representative working on the ISS stated, “No single nation is going to go on an exploration mission by itself. We are going to go as a species.”

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