

# Senate confirms ex-astronaut Bolden to head NASA

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FILE -- In this July 8, 2009 file photo provided by NASA, retired astronaut Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden, then nominee as the administrator of NASA, testifies during his confirmation hearing before the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee on Capitol Hill in Washington. The Senate Wednesday confirmed Bolden as administrator of NASA. (AP Photo/Bill Ingalls, NASA, File)

(AP) -- The Senate confirmed on Wednesday retired astronaut Maj. Gen. Charles Bolden as administrator of NASA, just in time for the space agency's 40th anniversary celebrations of man's first steps on the moon.

His confirmation also came just hours after the launch of [space shuttle Endeavour](#), which began a 16-day mission to the [international space station](#).

The Senate confirmed Bolden to head the National Aeronautics and Space Administration without objection. Bolden, who has flown in space four times and was an assistant deputy administrator at one point, will be the agency's first black administrator.

Former NASA associate administrator Lori Garver was also confirmed as the agency's No. 2.

The confirmation allows Bolden to be sworn in by July 20, 2009, 40 years after the [Apollo 11](#) moon landing.

Bolden told senators last week that if the U.S. chooses to lead in technology, it must commit to, among other measures, inspiring the rising generation of children to contribute in the fields of science and engineering as well as enhancing NASA's ability and expertise in understanding Earth's environment.

"Either we can invest in building upon our hard earned world technological leadership or we can abandon this commitment, ceding it to others who are working vigilantly to push the frontiers of space," he said during a confirmation hearing on July 8.

Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., another ex-astronaut, said Bolden will "bring back the magic from a time when we rode rockets to the moon."

Bolden would inherit a NASA that doesn't look much like the still-somewhat-fresh-from-the-moon agency he joined as an astronaut in 1980. NASA now "is faced with a lot of uncertainty," former Johnson Space Center Director George Abbey has said.

President George W. Bush set in motion a plan to retire the space shuttle fleet at the end of next year and return astronauts to the moon and then head out to Mars in a series of rockets and capsules that borrows heavily

from the 1960s Apollo program. The shuttle's replacement won't be ready until at least 2015, so for five years the only way Americans will be able to get in space is by hitching a ride on a Russian space capsule. And some of NASA's biggest science programs are over budget.

Bolden, a native of Columbia, S.C., will be only the second astronaut to run [NASA](#) in its 50-year history. Vice Adm. Richard Truly was the first.

In 2002, Bush unsuccessfully tried to appoint Bolden as the space agency's deputy administrator. The Pentagon said it needed to keep Bolden, who was a Marine major general at the time and a pilot who flew more than 100 sorties in Vietnam.

Bolden was the pilot of the shuttle flight that launched the Hubble Space Telescope into Earth orbit in 1990.

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