

Space tourist uses \$35M trip to back water issues

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Russian cosmonaut Maxim Surayev, center, holds a toy lion he plans to take to the International Space Station as a talisman with his crew mates Canadian billionaire philanthropist Guy Laliberte, left, and U.S. astronaut Jeffrey Williams, right, during their news conference at Russian Space Training Center in Star City outside Moscow, Russia, Thursday, Sept. 10, 2009. The three are the next crew scheduled to blast off to the International Space Station on Sept. 30. (AP Photo/Mikhail Metzel)

(AP) -- The next paying traveler to the international space station wants to use his \$35 million trip to highlight concerns about the world's water supply.

Guy Laliberte, the Canadian billionaire founder of the Cirque du Soleil, said Thursday that he aims to read a statement to the world about the planet's water problems after taking a Russian rocket to the space

station.

"I'm bringing a text that will be delivered to planet Earth ... for creating awareness about the water situation on Earth," Laliberte told reporters at the Russian astronaut training center near Moscow.

He said his reading from space will be part of several shows in 14 cities around the world beginning Oct. 9. Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, pop singer Peter Gabriel and Irish rockers U2 have also said they are participating in the event.

Laliberte and two others will blast off Sept. 30 from the Russian space program's [Baikonur](#) launch facility in Kazakhstan.

His crewmates, however, said the items they will bring aboard the [International Space Station](#) will be more personal.

Russian astronaut Maxim Surayev is bringing a plush toy lion that will hang in front of him after takeoff to signal the beginning of weightlessness. His preteen daughters kept the toy under their pillows to "make sure that the lion smells of home for the next six months."

U.S. astronaut Jeffrey N. Williams, a two-time space traveler, said he will have a picture of his family and infant grandson born only a month ago.

Williams and Surayev plan to stay in orbit for 169 days, while Laliberte will return to Earth after 12 days in space. Last week, Laliberte said he would try to persuade his fellow spacemen to don red clown noses; he is taking nine of them into orbit.

Williams said the team will complete the assembly of the space station.

"As we transition into the full realization of the space station, the results will enable us to go beyond and leave the orbit," he said.

The station's on-orbit construction began in 1998, and six shuttle flights remain to wrap it up. The station has already become the largest artificial satellite, weighing more than 710,000 pounds (322,000 kilograms) and orbiting the [Earth](#) at 220 miles (354 kilometers) high.

The station has cost more than \$100 billion, paid by the United States, Russia, Canada, Japan and the 18-nation European Space Agency.

Laliberte will likely be among the last private visitors to the space station for a few years as NASA retires its shuttle program and turns to the Russian space agency to ferry U.S. astronauts to the space station, crowding out places for tourists.

Laliberte has a 95 percent stake in Cirque du Soleil, a circus arts and theater performance company that turned 25 this year.

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