

Astronauts arrive for next-to-last shuttle launch

April 26 2011, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



This undated file photo provided by the office of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, shows Giffords, left, with her husband, NASA astronaut Mark Kelly. Giffords will attend her husband's space shuttle launch in Florida on Friday, Kelly said, allowing the Arizona congresswoman to travel for the first time since she was flown from Tucson to Houston more than three months ago to recover from a gunshot wound to the head. (AP Photo/Office of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, File)

(AP) -- The astronaut husband of wounded Rep. Gabrielle Giffords arrived at NASA's launch site Tuesday for this week's flight of space shuttle Endeavour, and said his wife would be following him "pretty soon" - in plenty of time for liftoff.

Endeavour is set to blast off Friday afternoon on its final voyage. It will be the next-to-last space shuttle mission.

Navy Capt. Mark Kelly and his crew flew into Kennedy Space Center early Tuesday afternoon, one hour before the start of the countdown.

Speaking on behalf of his five crewmates, Kelly expressed pleasure at seeing the astronauts' wives and children, who flew in a little earlier and gathered nearby.

Giffords was not among the crowd. She remained behind in Houston, where she is undergoing rehabilitation for a gunshot wound to the head. She was attacked Jan. 8 in her Tucson, Ariz., hometown.

"I'm personally looking forward to my wife, Congresswoman [Gabrielle Giffords](#), getting here pretty soon, to be here in time for our launch on Friday," Kelly told the crowd of family members and journalists.

"It's something she's been looking forward to for a long time," he said. "She's been working really hard to make sure that her doctors would permit her to come. She's more than medically ready to be here, and she's excited about making this trip."

Her doctors announced Monday that she could travel to Florida.

President [Barack Obama](#) and his family also will attend the liftoff.

NASA test director Jeremy Graeber said the presidential visit - and Giffords' presence - will not distract the launch team. It's exciting, though, to have so many people coming for Endeavour's final takeoff, especially first-time guests, he said.

Forecasters put the odds of good launch weather at 80 percent. Launch time is 3:47 p.m.

Endeavour will carry a \$2 billion particle physics experiment to the

[International Space Station](#) along with a load of spare station parts.

The 30-year [shuttle program](#) will end this summer with the flight of Atlantis.

More information: NASA: <http://www.nasa.gov/shuttle>

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