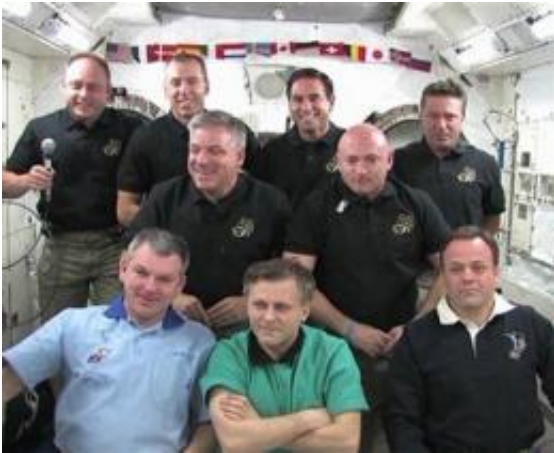


Astronauts pack up on next-to-last shuttle flight

May 28 2011, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



The crew of space shuttle Endeavour and the International Space Station gather for a joint news conference from the from the International Space Station Thursday, May 26, 2011. Commander Mark Kelly, second row right, says he can't wait to see his wife, Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, D-Ariz., for the first time from orbit and show her some cosmic views of his spaceship and the planet Earth. A videoconference between Kelly and Giffords is planned for Friday. The commander said he will conduct the video session from the space station's cupola, a glassed-in lookout. (AP Photo/ NASA)

Endeavour's astronauts took care of some last-minute space station chores Saturday before packing up to come home and end the next-to-last shuttle flight.

The [space shuttle](#) and its crew of six will depart the [International Space](#)

[Station](#) late Sunday night. They worked to repair one of the space station's air purifiers and straightened out the suits that were used in four spacewalks. The final [spacewalk](#) of the mission, on Friday, completed the U.S. portion of station construction.

Now that the spacewalks are over, Mission Control told the astronauts they "can bask in the glow of a job well done."

Shuttle pilot Gregory Johnson said it will be bittersweet to leave. He and his crewmates installed a \$2 billion physics experiment at the orbiting outpost, as well as an extension pole and a platform full of spare parts.

"It's been a fantastic mission," Johnson said in a series of news interviews. "It's the sort of mission that [astronauts](#) dream of having."

Johnson said he and his colleagues are spending their final hours at the space station doing "everything we can do to help the space station out before we return to Earth." The station is so big now, he said, that sometimes he takes a wrong turn and finds himself in the wrong chamber.

Endeavour is scheduled to return to Florida before dawn Wednesday, 16 days after blasting off.

After Sunday night's undocking, Johnson will guide Endeavour through a victory lap around the space station. He said he'll try to maintain a good position for the shuttle, "so we can get great photos of one of the final fly-arounds of the space station." The shuttle crew also will test out an experimental navigation system for future spacecraft.

This is the final voyage of Endeavour, the youngest in the shuttle fleet. NASA is closing down the [shuttle program](#) this summer after 30 years. Atlantis will fly one last time to the space station in July.

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