

Trump to call commander of International Space Station

April 19 2017, by Vivian Salama



In this Nov. 17, 2016 file-pool photo, U.S. astronaut Peggy Whitson, member of the main crew of the expedition to the International Space Station (ISS), gestures from a bus prior the launch of Soyuz MS-3 space ship at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan. President Donald Trump will speak next week to the commander of the orbiting International Space Station. White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Wednesday, April 19, 2017, the call with astronauts Peggy Whitson and Jack Fischer will take place on April 24. On that date, Whitson, the first woman to command the International Space Station, will have spent 535 days in space, the most time spent in space of any American astronaut. (AP Photo/Dmitri Lovetsky, Pool, File)

President Donald Trump will speak next week to the commander of the orbiting International Space Station.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer said Wednesday the call with Peggy Whitson—and fellow astronaut Jack Fischer—will take place April 24.

On that date, Whitson, the first woman to command the International Space Station, will have spent 535 days in space, the most time spent in space of any American astronaut.

Astronaut Jeffrey Williams currently holds the record.

The 57-year-old biochemist has also performed eight spacewalks, more than any other woman, and a ninth may be in the offing.

Whitson's current stretch in space was extended to September because an empty seat will be available on a Russian Soyuz capsule for her return.

Spicer said the call is partly intended to discuss the "importance of encouraging women to pursue careers" in STEM—science, education, technology and math—fields.

Astronaut Kate Rubins and Trump's daughter, Ivanka Trump, whose White House portfolio involves women's empowerment, will also take part in the call.

Last month, Trump signed new legislation adding human exploration of Mars to NASA's mission. The law authorizes \$19.5 billion in spending for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration for the budget

year that began Oct. 1.

Trump hailed the work of NASA when he signed the bill, saying it "has inspired millions and millions of Americans to imagine distant worlds and a better future right here on earth."

The call will air live on NASA TV.

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