

NASA picks 12 new astronauts from crush of applicants (Update)

June 7 2017, by Marcia Dunn



Vice President Mike Pence poses for a group photograph with NASA's 12 new astronaut candidates, Wednesday, June 7, 2017, at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. NASA chose 12 new astronauts Wednesday from its biggest pool of applicants ever, selecting seven men and five women who could one day fly aboard the nation's next generation of spacecraft. (Bill Ingalls/NASA via AP)

NASA chose 12 new astronauts Wednesday from its biggest pool of applicants ever, hand-picking seven men and five women who could one day fly aboard the nation's next generation of spacecraft.

The astronaut class of 2017 includes doctors, scientists, engineers, pilots and military officers from Anchorage to Miami and points in between. They've worked in submarines, emergency rooms, university lecture halls, jet cockpits and battleships. They range in age from 29 to 42, and they typically have led the pack.

"It makes me personally feel very inadequate when you read what these folks have done," said NASA's acting administrator, Robert Lightfoot.

Vice President Mike Pence welcomed the group during a televised ceremony at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. He offered President Donald Trump's congratulations and noted that the president is "firmly committed to NASA's noble mission, leading America in space."

Pence assured the crowd that NASA will have the resources and support necessary to continue to make history. He said he would lead a resurrected National Space Council to help set the direction of the program.

Under Trump, "America will lead in space once again, and the world will marvel," Pence said.

More than 18,300 people threw their hats into the space ring during a brief application period 1 ½ years ago. That's more than double the previous record of 8,000 set in 1978, when the space shuttles were close to launching.



This undated photo made available by NASA on Wednesday, June 7, 2017 shows the 2017 NASA Astronaut Class at the Johnson Space Center in Houston. From left are Zena Cardman, Jasmin Moghbeli, Jonny Kim, Frank Rubio, Matthew Dominick, Warren Hoburg, Robb Kulin, Kayla Barron, Bob Hines, Raji Chari, Loral O' Hara and Jessica Watkins. (Robert Markowitz/NASA via AP)

The 12 selected Wednesday will join 44 astronauts already in the NASA corps. U.S. astronauts have not launched from home soil since 2011, when the space shuttles were retired, thus the low head count. Americans have been hitching rides aboard Russian spacecraft in the meantime, but that could change next year.

After two years of training, the newbies may end up riding commercial rockets to the International Space Station or flying beyond the moon in NASA's Orion spacecraft. Their ultimate destination could be Mars.

SpaceX and Boeing are building capsules capable of carrying astronauts to the space station and back as soon as next year. A launch engineer and

senior manager for SpaceX, Robb Kulin, is among the new astronauts. He's also worked as an ice driller in Antarctica and a commercial fisherman in Alaska.

"Hopefully, one day, I actually fly on a vehicle that ... I got to design," Kulin said.

Kulin and his classmates may be in for a long wait. Some members of the class of 2009 have yet to launch.

Dr. Jonny Kim, a former Navy SEAL and specialist in emergency medicine, told reporters it "may be a little unclear" what the future holds, at least regarding what spacecraft he and his fellow astronauts might fly.

"We're just happy to be here," he added.



Vice President Mike Pence recognizes the newly introduced 12 new NASA astronaut candidates, Wednesday, June 7, 2017, at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, Texas. NASA chose 12 new astronauts Wednesday from its biggest pool of applicants ever, selecting seven men and five women who could

one day fly aboard the nation's next generation of spacecraft. (Bill Ingalls/NASA via AP)

Jack Fischer, who was in the 2009 group, just got to the space station in April, but he said he couldn't be happier as he showed the latest hires their "new office" in a video.

"It's a little bit cramped. The desk is kind of small. But the view. Oh, the view."

Geologist Jessica Watkins already has experienced space—vicariously—as part of the team working with NASA's Curiosity rover on Mars.

"We intend to send her to Mars one day, folks," NASA Flight Operations Director Brian Kelly said in introducing Watkins. She gave a thumbs-up.

This is NASA's 22nd group of astronauts. The first group, the original Mercury 7 astronauts, was chosen in 1959.

Altogether, 350 Americans have now been selected to become astronauts. Requirements include U.S. citizenship; degrees in science, technology, engineering or math; and at least three years of experience or 1,000 hours of piloting jets.

A brief look at the elite 12:



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— Navy Lt. Kayla Barron of Richland, Washington, a submarine-warfare officer and nuclear engineer who was among the first class of women commissioned into the submarine service and now works at the U.S. Naval Academy.

— Zena Cardman of Williamsburg, Virginia, a graduate research fellow at the National Science Foundation with a specialty in microorganisms in subsurface environments such as caves.

— Air Force Lt. Col. Raja Chari of Cedar Falls, Iowa, director of the F-35 Integrated Test Force at Edwards Air Force Base in California.

— Navy Lt. Cmdr. Matthew Dominick of Wheat Ridge, Colorado, department head for Strike Fighter Squadron 115.

— Bob Hines of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a NASA research pilot at Johnson Space Center.

— Warren "Woody" Hoburg of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, assistant professor of aeronautics and astronautics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

— Dr. Jonny Kim of Los Angeles, a Navy lieutenant who trained as a SEAL and is completing his residency in emergency medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston.



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— Robb Kulin of Anchorage, Alaska, who leads the launch chief engineering group for SpaceX at Hawthorne, California.

— Marine Maj. Jasmin Moghbeli of Baldwin, New York, who tests H-1 helicopters and serves as a quality assurance and avionics officer for Marine Operational Test Evaluation Squadron 1 in Yuma, Arizona.

— Loral O'Hara of Sugar Land, Texas, a research engineer at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts.

— Dr. Francisco "Frank" Rubio of Miami, an Army major who is serving as a surgeon in Fort Carson, Colorado.

— Jessica Watkins of Lafayette, Colorado, a postdoctoral fellow at California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, California.

More information: NASA: www.nasa.gov/2017astronauts

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