

World’s 1st female spacewalking team makes history

By **MARCIA DUNN**
AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. — The world’s first all-female spacewalking team made history high above Earth on Friday, replacing a broken part of the International Space Station’s power grid.

As NASA astronauts Christina Koch and Jessica Meir completed the job with wrenches, screwdrivers and power-grip tools, it marked the first time in a half-century of spacewalking that men weren’t part of the action. They insisted they were just doing their job after years of training.

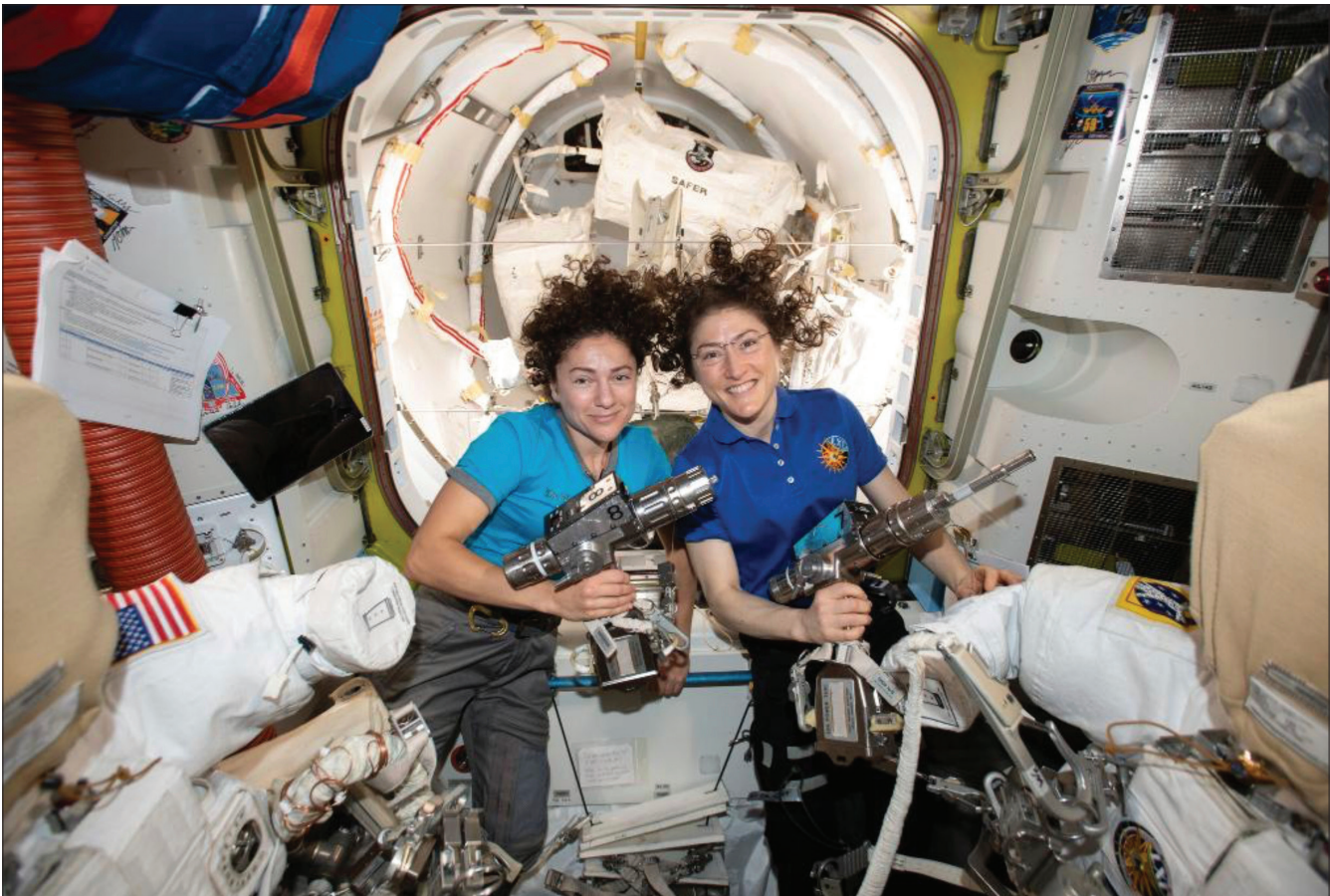
America’s first female spacewalker from 35 years ago, Kathy Sullivan, was delighted. She said it’s good to finally have enough women in the astronaut corps and trained for spacewalking for this to happen.

“We’ve got qualified women running the control, running space centers, commanding the station, commanding spaceships and doing spacewalks,” Sullivan told The Associated Press earlier this week. “And golly, gee whiz, every now and then there’s more than one woman in the same place.”

President Donald Trump put in a congratulatory call from the White House to mark “this historic event ... truly historic.”

“What you do is incredible. You’re very brave people,” Trump told them as they wrapped up their spacewalk.

Replied Meir: “We don’t want to take too much credit because there have been many others — female spacewalk-



In this photo released by NASA on Thursday, U.S. astronauts Jessica Meir, left, and Christina Koch pose for a photo in the International Space Station.

ers — before us. This is just the first time that there have been two women outside at the same time. ... For us, this is really just us doing our job.”

NASA leaders, Girl Scouts and others also cheered Koch and Meir on. Parents also sent in messages of thanks and encouragement via social media. NASA included some in its TV coverage. “Go girls go,” two young sisters wrote on a sign in crayon. A group of middle-schoolers held a long sign reading “The sky is not the limit!!”

At the same time, many expressed hope this will

become routine in the future.

Tracy Caldwell Dyson, a three-time spacewalker who looked on from Mission Control in Houston, added: “Hopefully, this will now be considered normal.”

NASA originally wanted to conduct an all-female spacewalk last spring, but did not have enough medium-size suits ready to go until summer. Koch and Meir were supposed to install more new batteries in a spacewalk next week, but had to venture out three days earlier to deal with an equipment failure that occurred over the weekend.

It was the second such failure of a battery charger this year, puzzling engineers and putting a hold on future battery installations for the solar power system.

NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine watched the big event unfold from Washington headquarters.

“We have the right people doing the right job at the right time,” he said. “They are an inspiration to people all over the world including me. And we’re very excited to get this mission underway.”

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi sent congratula-

tions to Koch and Meir “for leaving their mark on history” and tweeted that they’re an inspiration to women and girls across America.

The spacewalkers’ main job was to replace the faulty 19-year-old old charge-regulating device — the size of a big, bulky box — for one of the three new batteries that was installed last week by Koch and Andrew Morgan.

“Jessica and Christina, we are so proud of you,” said Morgan, one of four astronauts inside. He called them his “astrosisters.”

Spacewalking is widely

considered the most dangerous assignment in orbit. Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano, who operated the station’s robot arm from inside during Friday’s spacewalk, almost drowned in 2013 when his helmet flooded with water from his suit’s cooling system.

“Everyone ought to be sending some positive vibes by way of airwaves to space for these two top-notch spacewalkers,” Dyson said early in the spacewalk.

Meir, a marine biologist making her spacewalking debut, became the 228th person in the world to conduct a spacewalk and the 15th woman. It was the fourth spacewalk for Koch, an electrical engineer who is seven months into an 11-month mission that will be the longest ever by a woman. Both are members of NASA’s Astronaut Class of 2013, the only one equally split between women and men.

Pairing up for a spacewalk was especially meaningful for Koch and Meir; they’re close friends. They’re also both former Girl Scouts.

It took two decades for women to catch up with men in the spacewalking arena.

The world’s first spacewalker on March 18, 1965, Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov, died last week. NASA astronaut Ed White became the first U.S. spacewalker less than three months after Leonov’s feat. Women did not follow out the hatch until 1984. The first was Soviet cosmonaut Svetlana Savitskaya. Sullivan followed three months later.

Friday’s milestone spacewalk was the 421st for team Earth.

Shifting explanations draw GOP alarm

By **LISA MASCARO, ANDREW TAYLOR AND MARY CLARE JALONICK**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The shifting White House explanation for President Donald Trump’s decision to withhold military aid from Ukraine drew alarm Friday from Republicans as the impeachment inquiry brought a new test of their alliance.

Trump, in remarks at the White House, stood by his acting chief of staff, Mick Mulvaney, whose earlier comments undermined the administration’s defense in the impeachment probe. Speaking Thursday at a news conference, Mulvaney essentially acknowledged a quid pro quo with Ukraine that Trump has long denied, saying U.S. aid was withheld from Kyiv to push for an investigation of the Democratic National Committee and the 2016 election. He later clarified his remarks.

Trump appeared satisfied with Mulvaney’s clarification and the president dismissed the entire House inquiry as “a terrible witch hunt. This is so bad for our country.”

But former Ohio Gov. John Kasich, who ran against



President Donald Trump speaks during an event where he congratulated astronauts Jessica Meir and Christina Koch as they conduct the first all-female spacewalk, from the Roosevelt Room of the White House on Friday in Washington.

Trump in the 2016 Republican primary, said he now supports impeaching the president.

Mulvaney’s admission, he said, was the “final straw.”

In Congress, at least one Republican, Rep. Francis Rooney of Florida, spoke out publicly, telling reporters that he and others were concerned by Mulvaney’s remarks. Rooney said he’s open to considering all sides in the impeachment inquiry. He also said Mulvaney’s comments cannot simply be undone by a follow-up statement.

“It’s not an Etch-A-Sketch,” said Rooney, a former ambassador to the

Holy See under President George W. Bush.

“The only thing I can assume is, he meant what he had to say — that there was a quid pro quo on this stuff,” he said.

The tumult over Mulvaney’s remarks capped a momentous week in the impeachment investigation as the admission, from highest levels of the administration, undercut the White House defense and pushed more evidence into the inquiry.

GOP leaders tried to contain the fallout. But four weeks into the inquiry, the events around Trump’s interaction with the Ukraine pres-

ident, which are at the heart of impeachment, have upended Washington.

The Energy Secretary, Rick Perry, who has been caught up in the probe, announced his resignation. A beloved House chairman, Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., a leading figure in the investigation, died amid ongoing health challenges.

The march toward an impeachment vote now seems all but inevitable, so much so that the highest-ranking Republican, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, privately told his GOP colleagues this week to expect action in the House by Thanksgiving with a Senate trial by Christmas.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi has given no timeline for conclusion but wants the inquiry completed “expeditiously.” She said Thursday that facts of the investigation will determine next steps.

“The timeline will depend on the truth line,” she told reporters.

This week’s hours of back-to-back closed-door hearings from diplomats and former top aides appeared to be providing investigators with a remarkably consistent account of the run-up and aftermath of Trump’s call with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Doubts about Census higher with minorities

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Around 84% of Americans definitely or probably plan to answer the questions on the 2020 Census, according to a new survey released Friday.

The Pew Research Center survey also found that around 16% of people surveyed express some doubts about responding next spring.

The hesitancy in participating in the head count seems higher in black, Hispanic and low-income communities — which all have been either undercounted or considered hard to count in past censuses.

The U.S. Census Bureau is predicting a self-response rate of 60.5% next year for the first decennial census in which respondents will be encouraged to answer the questions online, although they can also respond by telephone and a mailed-in paper form. Census Bureau workers will be sent out to interview in-person people who don’t answer the questions on their own.

According to the Pew survey, there was a near universal awareness about the 2020 head count — with 94% of respondents saying the cen-

sus is very important or somewhat important for the nation.

“The new survey finds wide awareness about the census across all demographic groups,” according to a Pew report on its survey.

The Pew survey found no differences between Democrats and Republicans regarding awareness and plans to participate. But there were differences in awareness and planned participation based on age, education level and income.

Age was a predictor of whether people said they would participate, with adults between 18 and 29 the least likely to participate of four age groups, according to the survey.

People with a bachelor’s degree or higher, or incomes over \$75,000, were more likely to have heard something recently about the census, the survey said.

The 2020 Census will determine how many congressional seats each state gets and guide the allocation of hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funding.

The survey was conducted online among 6,878 adults, in English and Spanish, last month.

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