

Nearly 3,000 people are leaving NASA, and this director is one of them

You can add another name to the thousands of employees leaving NASA as the Trump administration primes the space agency for a 25 percent budget cut.

On Monday, NASA announced that Makenzie Lystrup will leave her post as director of the Goddard Space Flight Center on Friday, August 1. Lystrup has held the top job at Goddard since April 2023, overseeing a staff of more than 8,000 civil servants and contractor employees, and a budget last year of about \$4.7 billion.

These figures make Goddard the largest of NASA's 10 field centers primarily devoted to scientific research and development of robotic space missions, with a budget and workforce comparable to NASA's human spaceflight centers in Texas, Florida, and Alabama. Officials at Goddard manage the James Webb and Hubble telescopes in space, and Goddard engineers are assembling the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope, another flagship observatory scheduled for launch late next year.

"We're grateful to Makenzie for her leadership at NASA Goddard for more than two years, including her work to inspire a Golden Age of explorers, scientists, and engineers," Vanessa Wyche, NASA's acting associate administrator, said in a statement.

Cynthia Simmons, Goddard's deputy director, will take over as acting chief at the space center. Simmons started work at

Goddard as a contract engineer 25 years ago.

Lystrup came to NASA from Ball Aerospace, now part of BAE Systems, where she managed the company's work on civilian space projects for NASA and other federal agencies. Before joining Ball Aerospace, Lystrup earned a doctorate in astrophysics from University College London and conducted research as a planetary astronomer.

Formal dissent

The announcement of Lystrup's departure from Goddard came hours after the release of an open letter to NASA's interim administrator, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, signed by hundreds of current and former agency employees. The letter, titled the "The Voyager Declaration," identifies what the signatories call "recent policies that have or threaten to waste public resources, compromise human safety, weaken national security, and undermine the core NASA mission."

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