

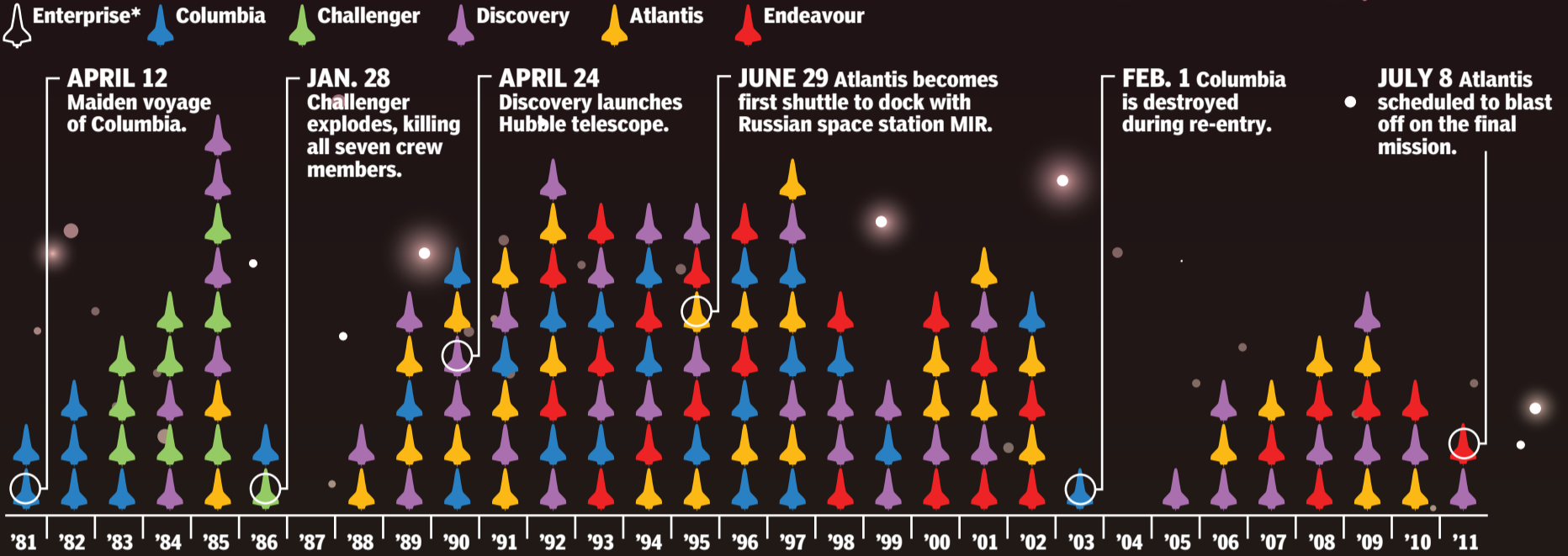
LAST IN SPACE

An estimated one million Americans have descended on the east coast of Florida to bid farewell to the 30-year space shuttle era. At 11:26 a.m. Friday — weather permitting — Atlantis will blast off from the Kennedy Center on the 135th and final mission of a program marked by triumph but touched by tragedy.

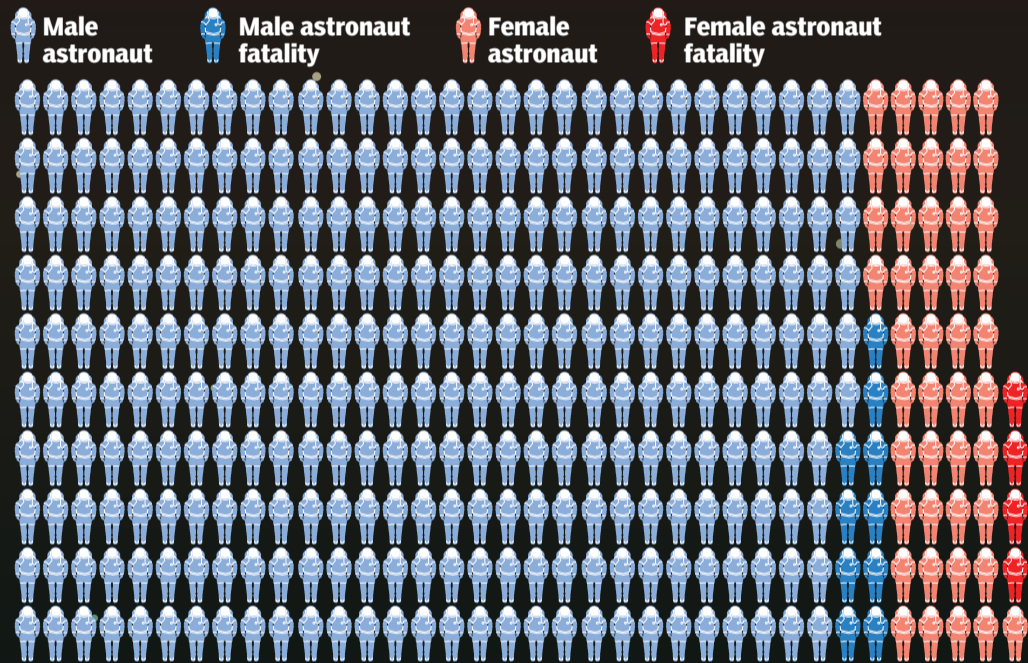
While President Barack Obama has promised a new era of missions to asteroids and Mars, many fear that the United States may perhaps give up sending people into space altogether.



SHUTTLE-LAUNCH TIMELINE



INDIVIDUAL SPACE TRAVELLERS

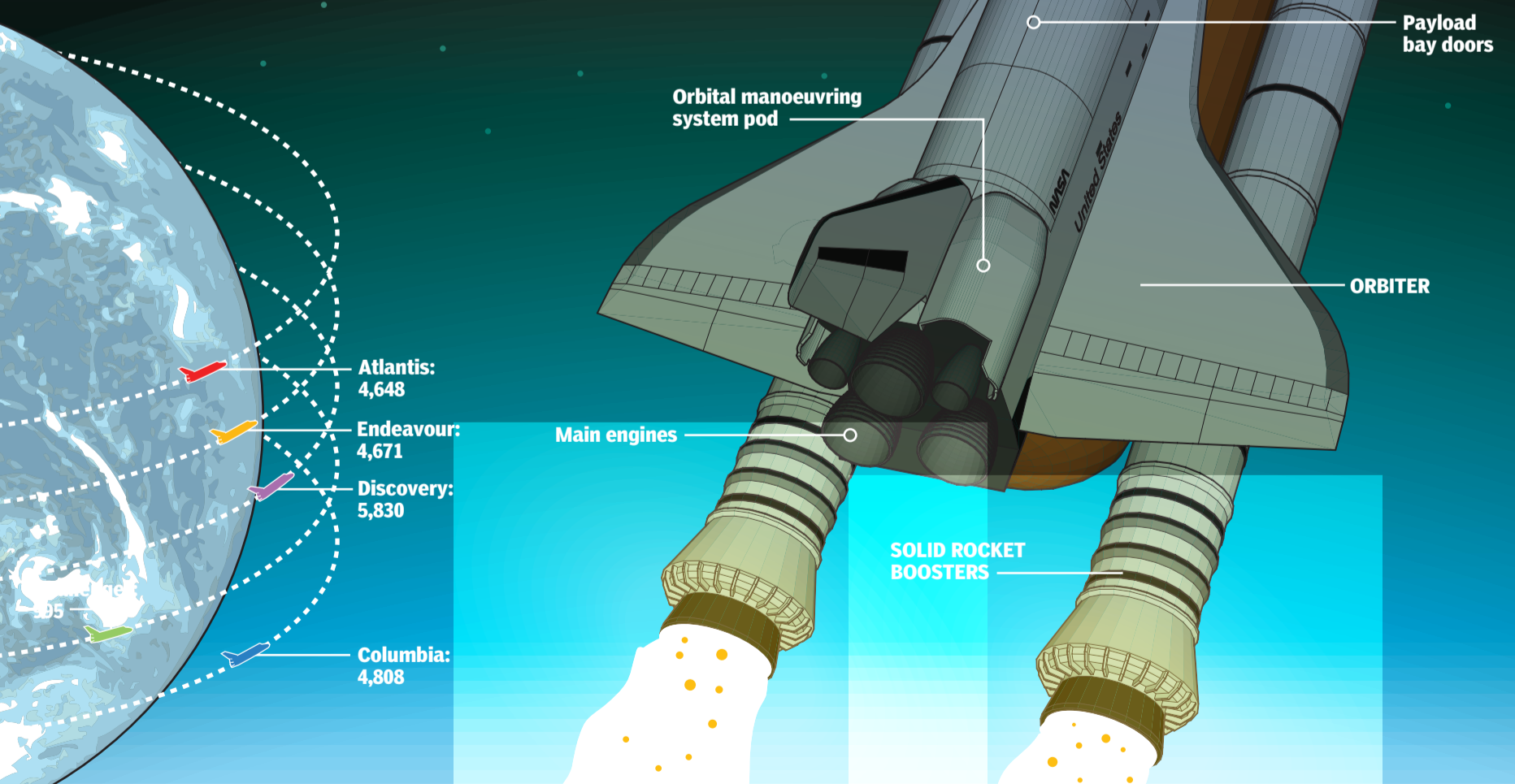


SPACE SHUTTLE SYSTEM

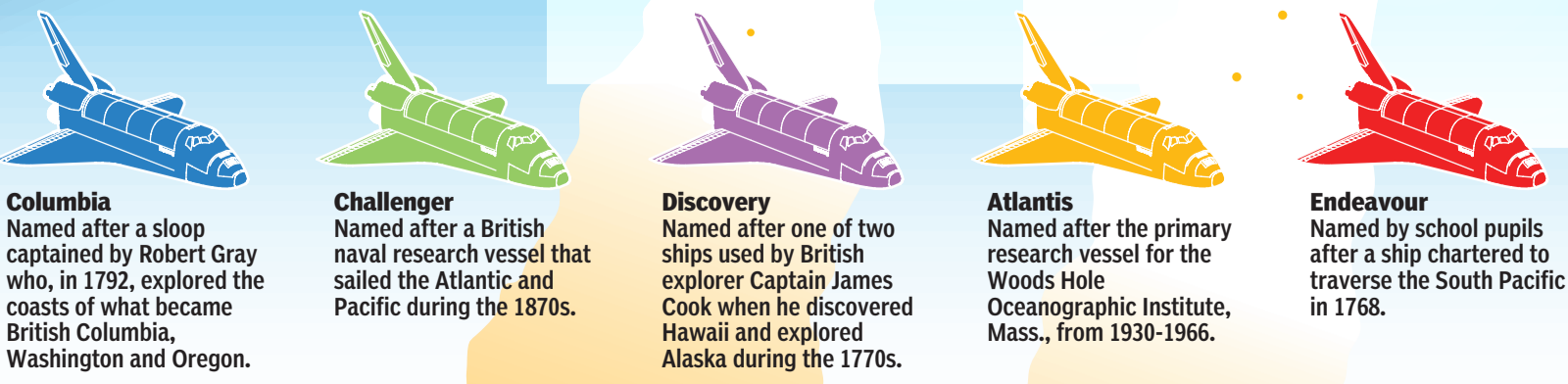
The space shuttle system consists of three major components: the Orbiter that houses the crew; a large external tank that holds fuel for the main engines; and two solid rocket boosters that provide most of the thrust during the first two minutes of flight. All of the components are reused except for the fuel tank, which burns up in the atmosphere after each launch.

EARTH ORBITS

20,952 total orbits through 134 flights



ORIGIN OF ORBITER NAMES



The Enterprise was the first space shuttle orbiter. It was constructed without engines or a functional heat shield, and was therefore not capable of space flight. NASA used it to perform test flights in the atmosphere.