

Press Release

Thomas Zurbuchen to be awarded with the Prix Suisse 2026

- **Prof. Dr. Thomas H. Zurbuchen, astrophysicist, former NASA Associate Administrator for Science, and current head of ETH Zurich Space, will be receiving the Prix Suisse 2026**
- **As NASA's Associate Administrator for Science, he oversaw a budget of up to \$8 billion and advanced 130 missions, including James Webb, Perseverance, and DART**
- **On November 7, 2026, at the Kursaal Bern, experts will explore the «Future of Space» - discussing where the journey into space is headed and what that means for Switzerland**

Suhr, May 12, 2026 – On November 7, 2026, the Prix Suisse will be awarded for the sixth time at the Kursaal Bern. The award annually honours an outstanding personality from the fields of business, science, sports or culture. The Prix Suisse 2026 goes to Prof. Dr. Thomas H. Zurbuchen. The Swiss-born astrophysicist from the Bernese Oberland served as NASA's Associate Administrator for Science from 2016 to 2022 – a position no Swiss citizen had ever held before. Today, he leads ETH Zurich Space. The award honours a career that has written Switzerland's name into the universe

A World-Class Swiss Career

During his time at NASA, Thomas H. Zurbuchen oversaw a budget of up to 8 billion dollars and advanced 130 groundbreaking missions. Among them are some of the most significant projects in recent scientific history: the James Webb Space Telescope, which opened a new window into the early universe, the Mars mission Perseverance, and DART – humanity's first successful asteroid defense test.

With his visionary foresight and entrepreneurial thinking, Zurbuchen has fundamentally redefined the way NASA conducts science. Among other things, he established programs in which companies take an active role in scientific missions, thereby ushering in a paradigm shift in the relationship between public research and private innovation.

Returning to Switzerland – A Bridge-Builder at ETH Zurich

After more than 20 years in the United States, Thomas Zurbuchen returned to his Swiss roots in 2023. Since then, he has led ETH Zurich Space as a professor of space science and technology.

In this role, he sees himself explicitly as a bridge-builder between science, industry, and society—with the goal of positioning Switzerland as a hub for innovation in the global space sector.

«Whoever leads in space sets the rules on Earth. Switzerland has everything it needs to play a central role in this new sphere.»

— Prof. Dr. Thomas H. Zurbuchen, Laureate of the Prix Suisse 2026

With the 2026 Prix Suisse, Initiative Switzerland is honoring not only Zurbuchen's scientific achievements but also the role model he serves for a new generation of Swiss researchers.

2026 Focus Topic: “Future of Space”

Space has become the strategic arena of the 21st century. Nations and companies are investing billions to secure their position beyond the atmosphere. Lunar bases, Mars missions, and asteroid mining are on the agenda. Satellite networks connect remote regions—in the future, global broadband coverage from orbit will become basic infrastructure.

At the Prix Suisse 2026, experts, together with Thomas Zurbuchen, will outline where the journey is headed—and what opportunities and challenges this holds for Switzerland.

Prix Suisse

Initiative Switzerland annually honours an outstanding personality with the Prix Suisse. The recipients of the "Prix Suisse" are individuals who have made exceptional contributions to Switzerland in recent years and who stand out through courage, innovation and creativity. The award is presented alternately in the fields of business, science, sports and culture.

The first recipient in 2021, in the category of business, was entrepreneur and politician Peter Spuhler. In 2022, physician and scientist Martine Clozel received the award. In November 2023, exceptional athlete Marco Odermatt was honoured. In 2024, Büne Huber — musician, painter and frontman of the cult band Patent Ochsner — received the Prix Suisse in the category of culture. Last year, entrepreneur and innovator Willy Michel was awarded the Prix Suisse in the category of business.

About Initiative Switzerland

As a foundation, Initiative Switzerland supports innovative ideas and projects across all regions and language areas of Switzerland. In doing so, it actively promotes the country's competitiveness and prosperity. Through its activities and initiatives, it aims to help ensure that Switzerland can sustainably maintain its global leadership position and innovative strength.

Initiative Switzerland is led by Stefan Linder, co-founder of the Swiss Economic Forum and its former long-standing CEO and delegate.

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