

NASA record holder can relate to astronauts stuck in space. He was, too

August 30 2024, by Marcia Dunn



In this photo released by Roscosmos State Corporation, NASA astronaut Frank Rubio sits in a chair shortly after the landing of the Russian Soyuz MS-23 space capsule about 150 km (90 miles) south-east of the Kazakh town of Zhezkazgan, Kazakhstan, Sept. 27, 2023. Credit: Ivan Timoshenko/Roscosmos Space Corporation via AP, File

NASA's record-holding astronaut is urging his two stuck-in-space colleagues to stay positive and "keep up the good work."

Frank Rubio knows firsthand about unexpectedly long spaceflights. His own visit to the International Space Station lasted just over a year, twice as long as planned.

So for the past two weeks, he's been helping out with [his friends' extended stay](#). He said he spoke with Suni Williams on Thursday and expressed pride in how she and Butch Wilmore have coped with their situation.

Williams and Wilmore should have returned to Earth on Boeing's troubled Starliner capsule back in June, a week after blasting off on its first test flight with a crew. After extensive tests and analysis of thruster problems and helium leaks, NASA decided last weekend it would be safer for SpaceX to fly them home, but that won't happen until February, more than eight months after they blasted off.

"They're doing great work, really maintaining a [positive attitude](#) up there, setting a great example and knocking out a whole lot of extra work on the [space station](#)," Rubio told The Associated Press from NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston.

While remaining in space until next year is not "the optimal outcome," Rubio said, "they've done a fantastic job of dealing with adversity." Their families, like his own, also have had to make sacrifices because of the switch in plans.



NASA astronauts Suni Williams, left, and Butch Wilmore stand together for a photo enroute to the launch pad at Space Launch Complex 41 Wednesday, June 5, 2024, in Cape Canaveral, Fla., for their liftoff on the Boeing Starliner capsule to the international space station. Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara, File



In this photo provided by NASA, Boeing Crew Flight Test astronauts Butch Wilmore, left, and Suni Williams pose for a portrait inside the vestibule between the forward port on the International Space Station's Harmony module and Boeing's Starliner spacecraft on June 13, 2024. Credit: NASA via AP, File

"But that's part of our job is just to adapt and overcome and make the best of the situation," he said, "and they've done just that, so super proud of them."

Williams and Wilmore haven't spoken publicly about the Starliner dilemma since their [lone orbital news conference](#) last month, well before the decision to bump them to SpaceX and bring Boeing's capsule back empty in early September.

Rubio's own mission was extended after his Russian Soyuz capsule was hit by space junk and leaked all its coolant. A new Soyuz had to be rushed up for him and his two Russian crewmates, and they rode it back to Earth last September. Rubio holds the U.S. record for the longest single spaceflight with his 371-day mission.

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