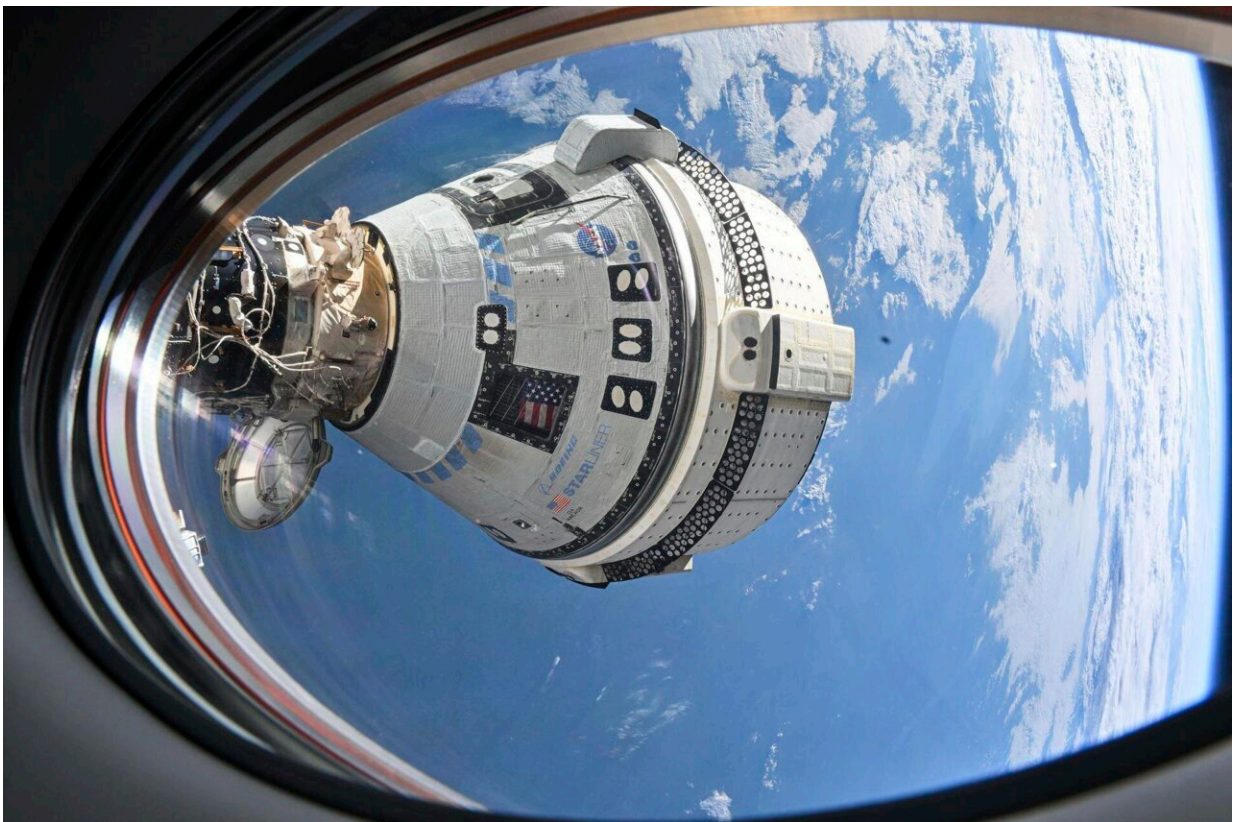


NASA will decide Saturday if Boeing's new capsule is safe enough to fly 2 astronauts back from space

August 23 2024, by Marcia Dunn



This photo provided by NASA shows Boeing's Starliner spacecraft which launched astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams to the International Space Station docked to the Harmony module's forward port on July 3, 2024, seen from a window on the SpaceX Dragon Endeavour spacecraft docked to the adjacent port. Credit: NASA via AP

NASA said Thursday it will decide this weekend whether Boeing's new capsule is safe enough to return [two astronauts](#) from the International Space Station, where they've been waiting since June.

Administrator Bill Nelson and other top officials will meet Saturday. An announcement is expected from Houston once the meeting ends.

Astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams launched aboard Boeing's Starliner on June 5. The [test flight](#) quickly [encountered thruster failures](#) and helium leaks so serious that NASA kept the capsule parked at the station as [engineers debated what to do](#).

SpaceX could retrieve the astronauts, but that would keep them up there until next February. They were supposed to return after a week or so at the station.

If NASA decides SpaceX is the way to go, Starliner would return to Earth empty in September.

Engineers are evaluating a new computer model for the Starliner thrusters and how they might perform as the capsule descends out of orbit for a touchdown in the U.S. Western desert. The results, including updated risk analyses, will factor into the final decision, NASA said.

Boeing said earlier this month that extensive testing of thrusters in space and on the ground demonstrated Starliner's ability to safely return the astronauts.



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

It was the company's first astronaut flight, delayed for years by a multitude of [capsule](#) problems. Two previous Starliner test flights had no one on board.

NASA hired Boeing and SpaceX a decade ago, after the space shuttles retired, to ferry its [astronauts](#) to and from the station. SpaceX has been at it since 2020.

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