

NASA cuts 2 from next SpaceX flight to make room for astronauts stuck at space station

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This photo provided by SpaceX shows, from left, Russian Aleksandr Gorbunov, and NASA's Nick Hague, Zena Cardman and Stephanie Wilson at SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, Calif., on May 6, 2024. Credit: SpaceX via AP

NASA on Friday cut two astronauts from the next crew to make room on the return trip for the [two stuck at the International Space Station](#).

NASA's Nick Hague and Russian Aleksandr Gorbunov will launch in September aboard [a SpaceX rocket](#) for the orbiting laboratory. The duo will return with [Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore](#) in February. NASA decided it's too risky for Williams and Wilmore to fly home in their Boeing Starliner capsule, marred by thruster troubles and helium leaks.

Bumped from the SpaceX flight: NASA astronauts Zena Cardman and Stephanie Wilson. NASA said they could fly on future missions.

The [space agency](#) said it took into account spaceflight experience and other factors in making the decision.

After the shuttles retired, the U.S. relied on Russia to ferry crews to the [space station](#) until SpaceX began taking astronauts in 2020. The two countries have continued to trade seats. Next month, NASA's Don Pettit will be launching to the space station while NASA's Tracy Dyson will be returning to Earth on Russian capsules.

NASA turned to private businesses a decade ago, wanting two competing U.S. companies ferrying astronauts in the post-shuttle era.



In this photo provided by SpaceX in July 2024, from left, Russian Aleksandr Gorbunov, and NASA's Stephanie Wilson, Zena Cardman and Nick Hague stand together for a group photo in front of the launch tower at Launch Complex 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Credit: SpaceX via AP

Williams and Wilmore were Boeing's first crew, arriving at the space station in June for what was supposed to be a weeklong stay. Their capsule will return empty as early as next Friday, aiming for a touchdown in the New Mexico desert.

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