This SpaceX / NASA launch is a big deal, right? We'll ask an astronaut who knows

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Next week is finally looking like the time when American astronauts return to the International Space Station on *American* rockets.

For nearly a decade, NASA and the US space industry have been relying on Russia and its Soyuz rocket for rides to and from the ISS. But ever since NASA awarded Boeing, Sierra Nevada Corporation, SpaceX, and Blue Origin development agreements in spring 2011, the hope has always been that one of these private US companies might become the country's next space-taxi service (the first private company to do so). SpaceX has reached the launch pad before its competitors, and now many space enthusiasts will be eagerly watching what happens on May 27 when the company's Falcon 9 rocket is set to take off from Kennedy Space Center at 4:32pm ET (20:32 UTC).

Recently retired NASA astronaut Karen Nyberg knows the anxiety and excitement of launch day quite well. She served a total of 180 days in space in 2008 and 2013, flying into orbit both on the space shuttle and Soyuz vehicle. To prepare for her six-month stint to the ISS, Nyberg spent months learning the Russian language and traveling to Russia and Kazakhstan, even

as it kept her away from her young son. And next week, she'll be keeping a particularly close eye on SpaceX and NASA's big launch—her husband, fellow astronaut Doug Hurley, is the commander of SpaceX's first Crew Dragon mission.

Crazy and exciting all at the same time, right? This Thursday, May 21, at 2:30pm EST (18:30 UTC/11:30am PT), Ars Technica Senior Space Editor Eric Berger will sit down with Nyberg to discuss the personal and professional challenges in facing the unknown in our next Ars live chat. They'll talk about her career, how she and Doug met as astronaut candidates, what it was like to raise a son while in space, and her feelings in anticipation of this high-profile, upcoming mission.

In this socially distant, video-chatted conversation, Nyberg will field questions from Ars and readers to help us understand how monumental this moment could be and how Herculean the task of heading to the ISS still is in 2020. The discussion will happen through the livestreaming app Periscope and will be hosted on the Ars Technica Twitter account (@arstechnica—you can certainly @ us with questions). But we'll also embed the video below once things get underway for those who prefer to sit tight onsite. In the meantime, let us know what you'd like to ask by sharing the most urgent questions on your mind in the comments below.

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