

Musk launches SpaceX Starship rocket with Trump at his side

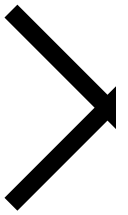
The president-elect travels to Texas with SpaceX CEO to watch the latest test of the billionaire's Starship rocket.

President-elect Donald Trump walks with Elon Musk before the launch of the sixth test flight of the SpaceX Starship rocket, November 19 in Brownsville, Texas. [Brandon Bell/pool via AP]

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Elon Musk, the world's richest man, launched the sixth test of United States President-elect [Donald Trump](#) joining him to w

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Trump and Musk travelled to Brownsville, Texas, on Tuesday to attend the launch of the giant Starship rocket at [SpaceX's](#) test site in nearby Boca Chica.

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The rocket lifted off shortly after 5pm (23:00 GMT), but SpaceX chose to abort a planned attempt to catch the first-stage booster of the rocket using the 'chopstick' technique, instead allowing it to fall into the ocean.

The last Starship test flight in October made headlines after the Super Heavy booster made a stunning return to the launch site where it was [captured midair](#) by a pair of giant mechanical "chopstick" arms attached to SpaceX's launch tower.

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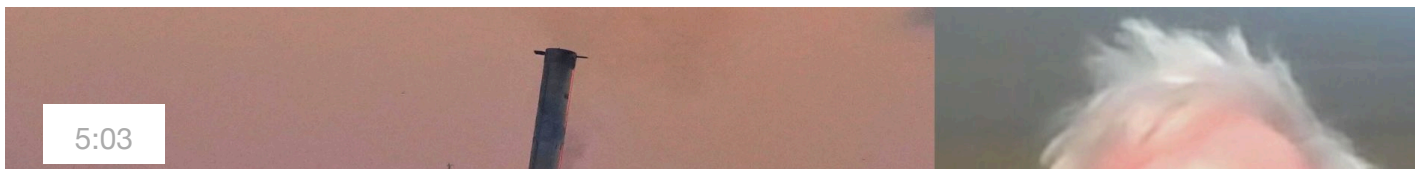
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Trump's attendance is part of a [growing bond with Musk](#) – the owner of SpaceX, the electric [carmaker Tesla](#) and the [social media platform X](#) – who is a strong political supporter, having spent close to \$130m to help get the former president re-elected.

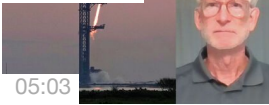
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Trump was expected to be joined by his son Donald Jr and Republican Senator Ted Cruz of Texas.

Starship, the largest rocket ever built, is designed to be a reusable vehicle for flying cargo and people beyond Earth.



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Musk's constant presence

Trump's presence at the launch is "another example of Musk's increasing role in Trump's orbit", according to a report by CNN.

Since Trump won the US November 5 presidential election, Musk has been a constant presence at the president-elect's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida.

He has counselled Trump on nominees for the new administration and joined the president-elect's phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Musk also flew with Trump for a meeting with Republicans from the House of Representatives in Washington, DC last Wednesday, and joined him for the [Ultimate Fighting Championship](#) at Madison Square Garden in New York on Saturday.

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Trump has recently rewarded Musk for his political support by appointing him, along with Republican Vivek Ramaswamy, to advise the newly created [Department of Government Efficiency](#) with a mission to slash government spending.

“Importantly, we will drive out the massive waste and fraud which exists throughout our annual \$6.5 Trillion Dollars of Government Spending,” Trump said in a statement about the appointment, one of his first after winning the election.

Musk’s businesses could benefit personally from his close ties with Trump. SpaceX – which has among its goals to eventually start a colony on Mars – has billions of dollars in government contracts. The billionaire has also battled with US federal regulators over safety concerns involving autonomous driving, which is available in his Tesla electric vehicles.

“Trump has the biggest possible regard for people who break the rules and get away with it,” said William Galston, a senior fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, told The Associated Press news agency.

“Musk has demonstrated extraordinary accomplishment in doing that.”

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Not always friends

The two have not always been that close, however. Trump used to mock Musk in his election speeches and Musk had once said it was time for Trump to “[hang up his hat & sail into the sunset](#)” because he was too old to be president.

But that changed after Trump survived an [assassination attempt](#) in the lead-up to the election. Musk endorsed Trump and became a central figure on the Republican campaign trail.

Trump even started to talk about Musk's space accomplishments while campaigning. He was intrigued when Starship's reusable rocket booster returned to the launch tower and was caught by mechanical arms.

"Did you see the way that sucker landed today?" Trump asked the crowd at a political rally after that Starship test.

So far, there are no indications that the friendship forged during the election is about to cool.

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Last week, Musk was a guest of honour at a black-tie event held at Mar-a-Lago.

Trump, in his remarks that night, said Musk's IQ was "about as high as they can get" and praised him as "a really good guy."

Musk was then invited to speak to the crowd.

"The public has given us a mandate that could not be more clear," Musk said of the election results, sounding more like Trump's running mate than a buddy.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA AND NEWS AGENCIES