

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 15, 2014

The Honorable Charles F. Bolden, Jr.  
Administrator  
National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
300 E St., SW  
Washington, DC 20546

Dear Administrator Bolden,

We would like to thank you for your service to our nation and the job that you do. You have great insight into our nation's space programs and we share a desire for these programs to be safe and successful. For that reason, we write out of concern for the following issues:

1. To date, anomalies that have occurred on launch vehicles under NASA contract and developed with substantial taxpayer funds; and
2. The lack of public disclosure or accountability to the American taxpayer on these anomalies.

We are aware of a significant near-term backlog in SpaceX launches for its NASA, DOD, and commercial customers. SpaceX contracted or planned for 24 Falcon 9 flights through 2013 and flew seven. They list nearly 30 flights for this year and next, yet have only flown three times, with the most recent July 14 flight finally launching after being delayed 12 times since September 2013 for numerous issues, including a chronic helium leak. This raises the question of schedule for critical launches and whether there will be adequate support for ISS, DOD and other commercial mission needs. The company publically notes a \$4 billion backlog of launches. There is a question as to whether SpaceX can even complete these launches along with current government obligations. Glaring evidence of this is that NASA has extended the original contract period for CRS by two years.

We fully support full competition for EELV's among certified providers. However, we have concerns that the process may be weakened due to recent attacks on the Air Force regarding oversight and the need to certify providers launching national security payloads. We strongly support the Air Force certification process and object to any effort to bypass it or loosen its standards. Similarly, we support NASA's high-value payload and human rating certification processes. The highly technical vehicles used for these missions can pose a risk to life and property if a malfunction occurs. The requirements for these vehicles were put into place to ensure that high standards are met to assure that the necessary precautions are taken to meet high-risk technical demands and to reliably deliver high-value payloads safely into orbit. Ignoring these standards would pose a high risk that would inevitably result in costly and preventable failures.

Recent news reports have shown that an epidemic of anomalies have occurred during SpaceX launches or launch attempts, including multiple helium leaks, loss of capsule control, multiple thruster issues, avionics issues, capsule contamination issues, and three consecutive seawater intrusions on ISS Cargo Resupply Service (CRS) missions. It should be noted that this is supposed to be a reusable capsule. Congressman Mike Rogers of Alabama recently submitted a letter to both NASA and the Air Force raising concerns about SpaceX flight anomalies. NASA's vague response claimed the agency cannot provide insight into technical anomalies, citing proprietary information, and placed the burden on SpaceX to provide the information.

To date, NASA has refused to provide insight into anomalies or mishaps that have occurred during nearly every phase of nearly every launch on SpaceX vehicles the agency has funded. Concurrently, SpaceX has introduced major design changes into the Falcon 9 rocket and Dragon capsule, further complicating

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the certification issue. Yet SpaceX is demanding to be certified immediately by the Air Force. In fact, SpaceX owner Elon Musk was recently quoted as saying, "I don't understand why we even have to fight for this. It should just be automatic." While Mr. Musk portrays the certification, transparency and accountability standards as unfair and expensive, similar processes apply to air travel - a less complex form of travel - and we see no complaints from that industry.

In the interest of full disclosure and accountability to the American taxpayer, we request that NASA publicly release all anomalies and mishap information, un-redacted, so that Congress can gain a better understanding of what has occurred and ensure full transparency. Because the development of the vehicles and capsule in question were funded by NASA dollars, we request that you provide Congress with the information you have on the various aspects of risk and reliability from these programs, including contractual, management, technical, manufacturing, cost, schedule and safety. We also request your opinion on the resultant risk to ISS support, resupply and crew well-being. Please provide your understanding of the specific technical issues, failures and resulting consequences for ISS (i.e. loss of scientific data, etc.) for each of these flights. Again, because the vehicles in question were funded by American taxpayer dollars, there should be no issue making this report publicly available.

This information is critical to Congress' understanding of these programs and the associated risks and as such, we respectfully request that you please provide this information within 30 days of your receipt of this letter. We thank you in advance for your cooperation and look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Mike Coffman  
Member of Congress



Mo Brooks  
Member of Congress



Cory Gardner  
Member of Congress