

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 1, 2015

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

In light of recent incidents within the United States commercial space industry, most notably the catastrophic failures on October 28, 2014, and June 28, 2015, we write to ask the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to undertake a full review of National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) contracted launch services and capsules.

We are committed to our nation's leadership in space, and equally believe we must be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars in achieving our priorities and goals for spaceflight. Moreover, with manned spaceflight on the horizon and our commercial space industry playing a substantial role, we believe that safety is of the utmost importance. Given our safety and fiduciary concerns, we believe that the recent launch failures warrant a review of NASA's contracts for commercial launch services.

Specifically, we request GAO to review and report on the following:

1. The risk and burden to the International Space Station (ISS) crew due to the interruption of cargo deliveries.
2. The costs, disruptions to operations, and adjustment to the cargo delivery schedule due to the recent ISS resupply failures.
3. The anomalies that have occurred on launch vehicles and capsules under NASA contract and developed with taxpayer funds. Please specify the type of anomaly, service provider, and corrective action taken.
 - Anomaly is defined by NASA as follows: "an unexpected event, hardware or software damage, a departure from established procedures or performance, failure to achieve designed mission parameters or outcomes, or a deviation of system, subsystem, or hardware or software performance outside certified or approved design and performance specification limits."


4. The companies providing commercial services to the ISS, the total number of launches scheduled for each company, and any delays or departures from the originally contracted schedule.
5. A list of damaged ISS cargo, including cause, cost, and the party responsible to reimburse the losses.
6. Number of launches listed by date for each launch provider, payments to each launch provider, and the total cargo in kilograms delivered to date by each provider.
7. Through the remainder of the contract period, number of launches listed by date for each launch provider, payments expected to be made to each launch provider, and the remaining cargo in kilograms expected to be delivered.
8. The demonstrated, statistical reliability of contracted commercial launch systems to provide subsequent launch services at reasonable and expected reliability levels.

It should be noted that NASA's responses to previous inquiries have stated that anomalies are proprietary; however, we maintain that these responses must at the very least be shared with Congressional Committees and appropriate Congressional staff. Indeed, the June 12, 2013, NASA Inspector General audit, *NASA Inspector General Commercial Cargo: NASA's Management of Commercial Orbital Transportation Services and ISS Commercial Resupply Contracts*, goes into great detail regarding anomalies in a public document. Unfortunately, this report did not reflect urgency in the need to take corrective actions and, if anything, intimated the anomalies were minor. We believe the fact that we currently have no operational U.S. Commercial Cargo launch vehicle providers shows the immediate and urgent need for appropriate oversight and corrective action prior to restarting operations.

In order to continue America's leadership in space, we believe the answers to these questions warrant Congressional review in order to ensure reliable and timely access to space. The systemic issues must be addressed in order to ensure both astronaut safety and protect the American taxpayer from commercial suppliers' failures. While we believe this situation warrants an independent review, we also believe that the current missions and pending contracts should continue to proceed uninterrupted.

Thank you for your consideration of this request and we look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Cory Gardner
United States Senator



David Vitter
United States Senator