September 30, 2016

The Honorable Michael Huerta  
Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration  
800 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20591

The Honorable Deborah Lee James  
Secretary, United States Air Force  
1670 Air Force Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20330

The Honorable Charles Bolden  
Administrator, National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
300 E Street SW  
Washington, DC 20024

Dear Administrator Huerta, Secretary James, and Administrator Bolden,

We write to express our strong support for the collective work of your organizations in facilitating the development of a robust, domestic commercial space launch industry, in order to establish fair and level competition in the National Security Space and Civil Space launch markets, and ensuring the safety of the public and the safe delivery of our nation’s critical scientific and military payloads to orbit.

The recent mishap involving a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket during a pre-launch ground test in advance of a commercial mission from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station is a reminder of the challenging nature of spaceflight. Fortunately, due to strong safety procedures and established regulatory processes, the mishap resulted in no loss of life, no injuries, and no damages to third party property.

We recognize that the space business is technologically challenging. Given these challenges, Congress many years ago passed bipartisan legislation governing the issuance of launch and reentry licenses for commercial spaceflight activities by the Secretary of Transportation. Accordingly, the FAA has established regulations that govern licensing as well as mishap and accident investigations. Consistent with regulations, the Falcon 9 anomaly has been properly classified as a “mishap” under federal law and is being resolved under applicable regulatory procedures.

We are pleased that FAA is maintaining a strong and prudent oversight role that appropriately draws upon private sector insight in ensuring a robust investigative process and safe return to flight for SpaceX. We encourage FAA to continue to leverage its considerable investigative expertise to help SpaceX come to resolution swiftly and safely, and we urge FAA to continue implementing its role in accordance with applicable federal law.
Further, we understand that the Air Force and NASA, as well as their federally-funded technical advisors, are actively participating in the Accident Investigation Team at the request of SpaceX, as well as pursuing parallel reviews. We applaud this approach as consistent with long-standing accident investigation procedures and post-anomaly return-to-flight processes internal to Air Force and NASA regulations. We are confident that current NASA and Air Force procedures will ensure that future U.S. Government missions that utilize the Falcon 9, and any other launch vehicle system, will undergo appropriate flight worthiness evaluations prior to flight.

Accidents are unfortunate events, and accident investigations should not be politicized. We encourage you to reject calls for your organizations to abandon established, well-considered, and long-standing procedures.

Sincerely,

Bill Flores
Member of Congress

Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress

David Schweikert
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Scott Perry
Member of Congress

Ted W. Lieu
Member of Congress

Dana Rohrabacher
Member of Congress

Andre Carson
Member of Congress

Bill Shuster
Member of Congress

Steve Israel
Member of Congress
Duncan Hunter  
Member of Congress

Filemon Vela  
Member of Congress

Mario Diaz-Balart  
Member of Congress

Brenda L. Lawrence  
Member of Congress

Thomas J. Rooney  
Member of Congress

Janice Hahn  
Member of Congress

Mark E. Amodei  
Member of Congress

Mark Takano  
Member of Congress

Ken Calvert  
Member of Congress

Niki Tsongas  
Member of Congress

Chuck Fleischmann  
Member of Congress

Donald Norcross  
Member of Congress

Scott Peters  
Member of Congress

Maxine Waters  
Member of Congress