

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY

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September 15, 2022

The Honorable Billy Nolen
Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration (Acting)
800 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Acting Administrator Nolen,

On September 12, 2022, Blue Origin's commercial suborbital launch vehicle, New Shepard, which launched from its launch site in West Texas, experienced an anomaly that caused the vehicle's abort system to activate. The vehicle, which was reportedly carrying science payloads, was uncrewed.

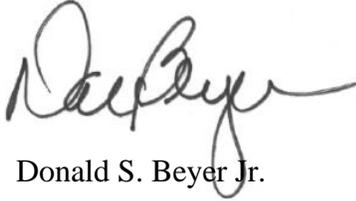
We are relieved that no humans were onboard for the New Shepard 23 (NS-23) mission and that the abort system functioned as designed. However, just over a month ago, a New Shepard vehicle carried out Blue Origin's sixth human commercial suborbital spaceflight in just over a year. On a different day with a different mission, this vehicle's anomaly could have put human lives in danger.

As the leaders of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics, whose jurisdiction includes commercial space, the FAA's Office of Commercial Space Transportation, and commercial space launch and reentry activities, we take our oversight role seriously.

To that end, we request that the Associate Administrator of the FAA Office of Commercial Space Transportation keep the Members of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics apprised of the plans and timetable for the NS-23 anomaly investigation, the root cause of the failure once determined, and plans to ensure that actions to address the root cause or causes are completed. In addition, we request that you brief Subcommittee Majority and Minority staff within the next 10 days on the plans and process for the investigation and provide future updates on the progress of the investigation, as appropriate.

Please contact Ms. Pamela Whitney of the Majority Staff and Mr. Tom Hammond of the Minority Staff to arrange for the briefing and to provide relevant information.

Sincerely,



Donald S. Beyer Jr.

Chair



Brian Babin

Ranking Member

Cc:

Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chairwoman, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Frank Lucas, Ranking Member, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Kelvin Coleman, Associate Administrator, FAA Office of Commercial Space Transportation