

Russia charging NASA \$70M per astronaut seat (Update)

April 30 2013, by Marcia Dunn



U.S. astronaut Karen Nyberg, left, Russian cosmonaut Fyodor Yurchikhin, center, and European Space Agency astronaut Luca Parmitano pose for the media before their final preflight practical examination in a mock-up of a Soyuz TMA space craft at the Russian Space Training Center in Star City outside Moscow, Russia on Tuesday, April 30, 2013. The three are scheduled to travel to the International Space Station from Baikonur Cosmodrom on a Russian made Soyuz TMA-09M space craft on May 29, 2013. NASA is paying \$424 million more to Russia to get U.S. astronauts into space, and the agency's leader is blaming Congress for the extra expense. NASA announced its latest contract with the Russian Space Agency on Tuesday, April 30, 2013. The \$424 million represents flights to and from the International Space Station aboard Russian

Soyuz spacecraft, as well as training, for six astronauts in 2016 and the first half of 2017. (AP Photo/Mikhail Metzel)

The U.S. space agency is paying \$424 million more to Russia to get U.S. astronauts into space and home again, and the agency's leader is blaming Congress for the extra expense.

NASA announced its latest contract with the Russian Space Agency on Tuesday. The \$424 million represents flights to and from the International Space Station aboard Russian Soyuz spacecraft, as well as training, for six astronauts in 2016 and the first half of 2017.

That's \$70.6 million per seat—well above the previous price tag of about \$65 million.

Russia currently provides the only means of getting people to and from the space station, and its ticket prices have soared with each new contract. The six seats included in the latest contract covers not only Americans but European, Canadian or Japanese astronauts under barter agreements between NASA and those countries.

Several U.S. companies are working on rockets and spacecraft to launch Americans from U.S. soil. But that's still a few years away. The ability to launch crews into orbit from the U.S. ended with NASA's shuttle program in 2011. Even before the shuttles retired, the U.S. had been relying on Russia to transport long-term residents to the space station.

NASA Administrator Charles Bolden said if Congress had approved the space agency's request for more funding for its commercial space effort, the latest contract would have been unnecessary. He is urging full funding of the Obama administration's 2014 budget request of \$821

million for the commercial crew program.

"Because the funding for the President's plan has been significantly reduced, we now won't be able to support American launches until 2017," Bolden, a former shuttle commander, wrote in a NASA blog.

It could take longer if Congress does not fully support the 2014 request, he said.

"Further delays in our Commercial Crew Program and its impact on our human spaceflight program are unacceptable," Bolden said.

The U.S.-based Space Exploration Technologies Corp., or SpaceX, already is making cargo shipments to the space station. Its founder and chief designer, billionaire Elon Musk, has said his company could be ferrying astronauts aboard improved versions of its Dragon capsules by 2015.

U.S.-based Orbital Sciences Corp. completed a successful test launch 1½ weeks ago. It plans to start sending supplies to the space station this summer, but it has no interest in carrying passengers.

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