

VINCE FONG
20TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

FONG.HOUSE.GOV

COMMITTEES
SCIENCE, SPACE
AND TECHNOLOGY
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0520

2468 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-2915

9700 STOCKDALE HIGHWAY SUITE 300
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93311
(661) 327-3611

2187 HERNDON AVENUE SUITE 101
CLOVIS, CA 93611
(559) 701-2530

October 18, 2024

California Coastal Commission
455 Market Street, Suite 300
San Francisco, CA 94105

Dear Commissioners Hart, Escalante, Aguirre, Bochco, Cummings, Harmon, Lowenberg, Notthoff, Rice, Turnbull-Sanders, Uranga, and Wilson:

I write with grave concerns over the California Coastal Commission's recent decision to prevent additional SpaceX rocket launches at Vandenberg Space Force Base (VSFB), with commissioners citing political animus to justify what should have been a non-political decision. As a Member of the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, I believe that government entities should encourage the spirit of innovation, especially in my home state of California, and reduce regulatory burdens on industry to enable the United States to compete with China and win the 21st century space race. As a Member of Congress, I believe that government decisions should be made in a fair and impartial manner, without regard to political views.

I understand that the Commission voted last week—against its own staff's recommendation—to non-concur with a U.S. Space Force proposal to increase the number of SpaceX's Falcon 9 launches at VSFB from 36 to 50 per year. Commissioners publicly stated that they want to prevent additional launches and cited concerns with the alleged political views of SpaceX CEO Elon Musk. In all my years in public service, I have never heard of a commission discussing politics as the basis for official action. This seems to be an egregious use of political discrimination to punish a specific company. I am most concerned that the Commission's actions risk the public's trust in our democratic institutions and their ability to rely on the First Amendment and Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, guaranteeing the free exercise of speech and due process.

The U.S. military, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and our nation's commercial space industry are working together to lead the global renaissance in spaceflight. As a California representative in Sacramento and now in Washington, I have strongly supported and witnessed these advances firsthand. I believe that politics has no place in our nation's collective advancement of space and defense technologies.

It appears the Commission feels differently and said the quiet part out loud. Commissioners extensively cited political animus to justify what should have been a non-political decision:

Commissioner Newsom:

Right now, Elon Musk is hopping about the country, spewing and tweeting political falsehoods and attacking FEMA while claiming his desire to help the hurricane victims with free Starlink access to the internet. But this claim in itself is to the public benefit is a falsehood because one must first purchase the Starlink startup kit for several hundred dollars and then face a monthly fee of \$120 after 30 days of free internet, a sick ploy to gain customers that are facing tremendous burden and dire straits. They're hurricane victims.

Chair Hart:

[...] you could argue that it's bringing in politics, but this is a political matter to some extent because it involves the U.S. government.

[...] It's not the other companies. This is about SpaceX increasing their launches, not the other companies increasing their launches.

Commissioner Cummings:

[...] we did see, you know, the owner of Starlink shut down Starlink when one of our allies was going to attack one of our adversaries. And so, while you all and we are all trying to operate in this apolitical space, we do know that the person who controls these companies has enough power to not work in the best interest, when they feel like it, of our allies.

Commissioner Wilson:

[...] we are talking about SpaceX in this. And I will say, and I just want to put it out there, as a person in this process, and as was mentioned earlier today, we are an appointed body. There's politics and policy and science; they mix in these spaces. It's real. This company is owned by the richest person in the world with direct control over what could be the most extensive global communication system on the planet. And just last week, that person was speaking about political retribution on a national stage. And it was very glib. But yet, he was standing next to a person, a candidate, that openly promotes and is working to normalize that language.

[...] What I'm trying to say is we can't hide from that, and we have to push back against that. And we're talking about the promotion of this technology and a human being that has so much power over that.

I believe it is unacceptable for the Commission to make decisions based on interpretations—or misinterpretations—of a person's political views, and it appears that the Commission has done just that. These types of actions should not only concern Californians, but also Congress, which has important oversight responsibilities to ensure that Federal taxpayer dollars and responsibilities delegated to states such as the Coastal Zone Management Act are carried out in a fair, non-political manner.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Vince Fong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Vince" and the last name "Fong" clearly distinguishable.

Vince Fong
Member of Congress