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Russia Charges NASA $70M Per Astronaut Seat

By The Moscow Times

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CAPE CANAVERAL, Florida — 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 Federal 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.

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.

"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.

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