

FAA GRANTS SPACE X LICENSE TO RESUME ROCKET LAUNCHES TODAY

Elon Musk's SpaceX rocket company has been cleared to resume flying following a launch pad explosion four months ago, the US Federal Aviation Administration said on Friday. The decision clears SpaceX to attempt to launch a Falcon 9 rocket carrying 10 Iridium Communications Inc satellites as early as today, a day later than originally planned. SpaceX, owned by Tesla Motors Inc Chief Executive Officer Musk, on Friday declined to comment about what caused the delay.

The FAA, which oversees commercial US space launches, oversaw SpaceX's investigation into why a Falcon 9 rocket burst into flames on a launch pad in Florida as it was being fueled for a routine, prelaunch test on Sept 1. The accident destroyed the \$62 million booster and a \$200 million Israeli communications satellite that had been partly leased by Facebook Inc to expand internet access in Africa. "The FAA has closed the investigation," the agency, which oversees com-

mercial US rocket launches, said in a statement. "SpaceX applied for a license to launch the Iridium NEXT satellites from Vandenberg Air Force Base. The FAA has granted a license for that purpose," the statement said. The launch will be SpaceX's first since August. The company has a backlog of more than 70 missions for NASA and commercial customers, worth more than \$10 billion. As a result of the accident investigation, SpaceX is changing the way it fuels its rockets to

prevent canisters of helium, located inside liquid oxygen tanks, from bursting. The company said the long-term solution will be to redesign the helium canisters, which are made of an aluminum liner and a carbon overwrap. The helium is needed to maintain oxygen tank pressure. The SpaceX rocket was briefly powered up on Thursday as part of a preflight engine test. "All systems are go for launch next week," Musk posted on Twitter. —Reuters



KOROLYOV, Russia: Galina Balashova, the artist who designed the first space habitation module for Soviet cosmonauts, shows drawings of her work in the city of Korolyov outside Moscow. —AFP

THE HIDDEN ARTIST OF THE SOVIET SPACE PROGRAM

KOROLYOV, Russia: When Galina Balashova designed her first space habitation module for Soviet cosmonauts, she drew a landscape on its interior wall, something that could remind them of home. An architect by training and an artist at heart, Balashova went on to spend three decades designing the interior of the Soyuz and other Soviet spaceships, making sure the crafts were not just metal carcasses stuffed with equipment, but also living spaces. Beginning in 1963 over just one weekend, she sketched the interior of the Soyuz craft at home after Sergei Korolyov, the father of the Soviet space program, asked that the ship be made habitable.

Engineers had fitted out the module with two giant boxes of instruments, but Korolyov had rejected the design and decided to get outside help. "They didn't understand what a living space is, they don't use spatial thinking but think in terms of instruments," said Balashova, now in her 80s. "Over the weekend, I thought of how to place the instruments, designing a sort of cupboard on one side and a sort of sofa on the other, where they could nap"—a ubiquitous setup in Soviet households.

After Korolyov approved her sketch, which included the landscape drawing on the wall, she also had to provide the actual watercolour painting that would go up into space. Since Korolyov had approved the design with a landscape drawing, the engineers "always asked for one" on subsequent modules. "Nine of (the paintings) went to space," laughed Balashova. Despite that, Balashova says she was not allowed to put her name under her work, complaining that her bosses took the credit.

'Floor and ceiling' in space

Balashova still lives in her tiny apartment in Korolyov, a town outside Moscow that is home to Russia's space mission control and named after the space travel visionary. Sitting in her living room, Balashova spreads out her watercolour space designs on the table, their airy pastels in odd contrast with the militaristic nature of the program during the space race era. "At first I want-

ed to create a space for microgravity that would not have a floor or ceiling," she said. But the futuristic vision was discarded for practical reasons.

"Humans train on Earth and they are used to the concepts of top and bottom." Cosmonaut Pyotr Klimuk, who travelled to space as part of the Soyuz and Salyut programs, agreed that it was important for colors and other elements of the Soyuz interior to create a "cosy" atmosphere. In the orbit module "certain elements were painted certain colors and special fabric was used," he said. "Delicate colors are better" and no matter the microgravity, the human eye "still believes there is a floor and ceiling," like on Earth, he said.

Colors were especially important in Balashova's work on the 1975 US-Soviet Apollo-Soyuz project, which would be seen by millions around the world and needed to fit in additional photo and video equipment. "My bosses wanted a red sofa but red showed up as black on film," she said. She struggled through four versions of the craft before finding a solution "when suddenly things were human-scale and there was harmony," she said. The resulting orbital module had a green sofa and velcro belts with which cosmonauts attached themselves, and even a folding table where they ate and signed the documents marking the symbolic joint flight. When visiting the module, American astronaut Vance Brand praised its "very convenient setup".

Treated 'like a servant'

Balashova still sits in a chair upholstered with the same green fabric she used to cover the Soyuz sofa. That too was a product of experimentation. Initial attempts to use velcro on the furniture led to cosmonauts "losing their jersey pants" on it, she giggled. Her flat is filled with books and watercolour portraits of family, with almost no sign that she influenced the look of generations of Soviet spaceships. She says her engineering bosses didn't value her work, looking down on her as an artist and a woman-one of the few working in the Soviet space industry and the only female in a creative position in Korolyov's team. —AFP

OBAMA HEALTH CARE LEGACY: COVERAGE, CONFLICT, AND QUESTIONS

'I REALLY DO CREDIT OBAMACARE WITH SAVING MY LIFE'

WASHINGTON: Although his signature law is in jeopardy, President Barack Obama's work reshaping health care in America is certain to endure in the broad public support for many of its underlying principles, along with conflicts over how to secure them. The belief that people with medical problems should be able to get health insurance is no longer challenged. The issue seems to be how to guarantee that. The idea that government should help those who can't afford their premiums has gained acceptance. The question is how much, and for what kind of coverage.

"The American people have now set new standards for access to health care based on the Affordable Care Act," former Surgeon General David Satcher says. "I don't believe it will ever be acceptable again to have 50 million people without access to health care." Obama's influence will continue in other ways, less visible and hardly divisive:

- 1- Medicare is shifting to paying for value,

and Medicaid for more than 50.

"If Medicare had been repealed, stories about Lyndon Johnson would have been different," said Robert Blendon, professor of health policy at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "A legacy is whether you did something that was sustained." Johnson was the Democratic president who won approval of Medicare and Medicaid in 1965. Already, the Republican-led Congress, taking its lead from President-elect Donald Trump, has started the process of repealing and replacing the health law. "Approaches that partisan are difficult to sustain as lasting, permanent features of the health care system," said Mark McClellan, Medicare administrator under Republican President George W. Bush.

Kaiser Family Foundation

Obama also failed to deliver on early promises to cut premiums. From 2009-2016, the amount employees pay in premiums for workplace coverage rose by hundreds of dollars,

we continue," said Rezny. "He took health care off the House and Senate floor - out of theoretical talk by people who are guaranteed lifetime health care - and actually allowed the people to experience it and have it."

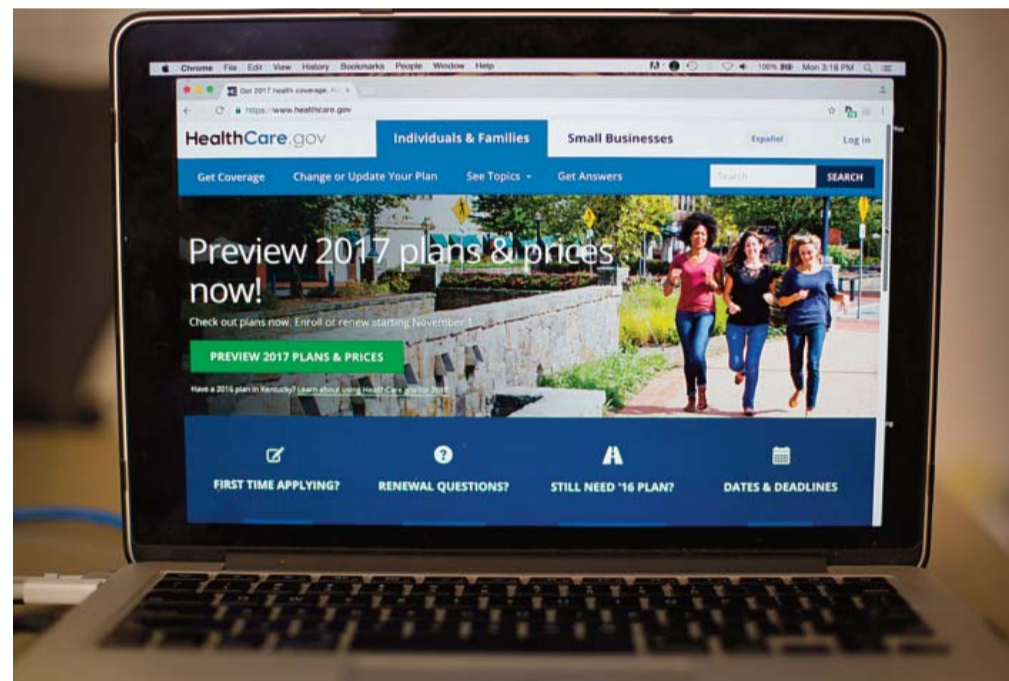
When the law passed, 48.6 million people were uninsured, according to the government. Through the first six months of last year, that dropped to 28.4 million. While employer coverage also grew as the economy strengthened, experts credit the ACA for most of the progress. The law provides subsidized private insurance along with a Medicaid expansion for low-income people. "It would have never been done without the focus and insistence of this president that we go big," said Kathleen Sebelius, Obama's first secretary of Health and Human Services. Obama set his sights high, but execution was a problem. When HealthCare.gov went live in 2013, the computer system quickly froze. It took a high-tech rescue effort to get things working for consumers.

The law's complexity also tripped people up. It uses the income tax system to subsidize premiums. Some HealthCare.gov customers saw their tax refunds reduced because they underestimated their incomes when applying for subsidies. Fines on those who remained uninsured hit people in their 30s trying to get traction in life. Officials in many states were alarmed by rising Medicaid spending. When Republicans won control of the House in 2010, Obama was effectively blocked from legislating fixes. The administration used regulations to try smooth out the law's rough edges, while successfully fighting off two Supreme Court cases that would have gutted it.

'Just nonsense'

In the face of problems, the White House ceaselessly talked up the benefits of the law. Among the controversial claims was that the law deserved much credit for a historic slowdown in national health care spending from 2009-2013. "Just nonsense," said Rick Foster, formerly Medicare's chief actuary, in charge of long-range estimates. "Far and away the biggest cause of the slowdown was the Great Recession. That is not to say that the Affordable Care Act didn't have some impact, but I think that was small compared to the effect of the recession and the weak recovery."

History shows that America's social programs got built in stages. Automatic cost-of-living increases weren't part of Social Security originally. Medicare didn't get a prescription benefit for nearly 40 years. Kris Case of Denver hopes that somehow, something like that can happen with Obama's overhaul. She works in customer relations for a technology company and buys coverage through the Colorado insurance marketplace. "Think of all the work that has gone into this imperfect thing," said Case, "and to just tear it down to make a point, rather than say it's flawed but we can fix it. "Just because you need to do the top floor doesn't mean you level the entire complex." —AP



not just volume.

- 2- The importance of prevention and front-line primary care is more widely recognized.

- 3- Doctors and hospitals have computerized their records systems, even if connectivity remains elusive.

The government has opened up massive files of health care billing data, enabling independent analysts to look for patterns of questionable spending. But conflict is part of Obama's legacy, too. He leaves the country deeply divided about the government's role in health care. Passed with no Republican votes, the 2010 health care law broke the pattern of major safety net programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, which had bipartisan backing. Social Security has stood for more than 80 years;

according to the nonpartisan Kaiser Family Foundation. And the average deductible - the annual amount patients pay before insurance kicks in - went from \$533 to \$1,221, an increase of nearly 130 percent. The achievements and difficulties of the Obama years are reflected in people such as Karen Rezny. "I really do credit Obamacare with saving my life," said Rezny, a massage therapist from Austin, Texas.

The health care law, or ACA, enabled her to get better treatment for advanced breast cancer. She was uninsured when diagnosed. Before the law, insurers would have rejected her because of her medical condition. Even with a subsidized premium, Rezny said she still struggles with cost. "What I would hope is that we would look back and say (Obama) got the ball rolling, and then

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