

# THE WEEK: 'Elon Musk is a messianic huckster and a scam artist'



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BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP/Getty Image

Elon Musk is a goofball techbro whose real business is quack philosophizing, not inventions or engineering.

I realize that the founder of Tesla and SpaceX really does make things, like electric cars and spaceships. But Musk's numerous attempts to realize his gleaming visions of a *Jetsons*-like future have never come close to living up to the (largely self-manufactured) hype. Lately he has started [claiming](#) that he is going to send cargo-laden rocket ships to Mars by the middle of President Trump's second term, in advance of the establishment of a permanent human colony. I'm not holding my breath.

Why have we allowed this lunatic a prominent place in our public and commercial life? Even his name makes him sound like the villain who convinces the Earth Federation in the year 4836 to trade in its fleet of perfectly serviceable if somewhat old-fashioned solar-powered starships for his sleek but shoddily made models that, allegedly, run on nothing but crystals from the planet Flion.

The line between science and science fiction has always been a blurry one. No sooner would Jules Verne write a story about, say, an electric submarine than some genius inventor would will it into reality. The problem with Musk is that he seems willing to calmly accept the reality of every nebulous *Star Trek* plot device in existence without bothering with the boring part where the thing actually has to work. Even a supercomputer operating on the principle of the so-called infinite monkey theorem could not devise a credible individual repository for all the wild things Musk believes. From the imminence of total human extinction to the perennial undergraduate assertion that, like, maybe we are all living inside in the Matrix, there is no implausible,

discredited, absurd-on-its-face theory or cause that Musk has not endorsed with brio.

It would be difficult to think of anyone else who routinely says things as blinkeringly stupid to large audiences as routinely as Musk. Take his most recent pronouncement on artificial intelligence, a favorite subject of his, proffered to the similarly screen-ravaged consciences that attend the annual South By Southwest technology conference in Austin, Texas. "The danger of AI is much greater than the danger of nuclear warheads by a lot," he [said](#). "Mark my words." Call me a Luddite, but I'm just not seeing it. The day when we are all putting on camo and fighting endless guerilla war against our cyborg overlords still seems to me pretty remote, alas.

There is one sense, however, in which I think Musk is absolutely correct about the threat posed by artificial intelligence to the flourishing of human kind. I am talking, of course, about self-driving cars. Just two years ago a bleary-eyed enthusiast in Florida, convinced of the mechanical infallibility of his robotic automobile, decided to ignore the road and watch a *Harry Potter* movie instead. Tragically but not, one thinks, very surprisingly, he soon collided with a semi truck and [died](#).

Did I mention that the vehicle in question was, in fact, manufactured by Musk's own firm, Tesla? What kind of lunatic expects us all to pay him handsomely for the privilege of climbing into machines he himself considers vastly more dangerous than already existing weapons that could eliminate every life on this planet in a matter of five seconds? What does it mean that in addition to riding in his Terminator sedans and IG-88 minivans of the future he expects ordinary Americans to look forward to the possibility of flying in one of his boutique spaceships to infinity and beyond? At least here on good old terra firma it is at least theoretically possible to jump out of a moving Tesla once you realize that it is hell-bent on bringing your earthly existence to a fiery conclusion. What hope would there be in the cold empty reaches of space when the SpaceX Jupiter module decides that you are a threat to the mission and must be destroyed? I wonder how long it will take to process a refund.

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The truth about Musk, though, is that for all his visionary cant there is nothing especially revolutionary about him. He is, in fact, a typical example of a type that is painfully familiar in American life: the shamanic huckster. Such persons have flourished in the fertile soil of this continent and the equally fecund imaginations of our free-thinking citizenry almost since the Mayflower. Sometimes people like Musk convince their fans to follow them into the desert and eat magic mushrooms in between a capella campfire renditions of "Masters of War" and freeform rap sessions on the mysteries of consciousness. Sometimes they see visions of both Jesus and assorted Hindi deities and declare themselves "greater than God." Sometimes they convince the Beatles to go with them to India. Sometimes they just hand out pamphlets outside train stations and bum cigarettes from tired commuters.

Musk is, thank goodness, much closer to the anodyne type of messianic lunatic than to the Jonestown variety. If it weren't for his peddling of high-priced death-traps that federal regulators have so far allowed to traverse our crumbling roads, I would feel comfortable declaring him essentially harmless. As things stand, Musk is someone we should mostly ignore rather than worry about. When the robot overlords somehow fail to take over the digital simulation we all inhabit, even he will be relieved.

# Elon Musk Is a Reckless Scam Artist

by **RSN Staff**  
about a year ago

 Elon Musk

In light of the recent failure in Florida – the [massive explosion](#) of SpaceX's Falcon 9 rocket and the

quick destruction of Facebook's \$195-million-dollar satellite as a result – it is important to test the validity and future of Elon Musk's space program and business model.

Earlier this year, Elon Musk was [quoted](#) as saying that the "Falcon 9 rocket costs about \$16 million to build... but the cost of propellant... is only about \$200,000." This egregiously wrong estimate raises questions about Musk's grip on reality — after all, just this year a single launch cost about \$62 million dollars.

The reason why costs have skyrocketed from previous estimates is that the Florida failure marks the second failure in fifteen months. This is of no surprise — rocket delays are very common for SpaceX. Critics and fans alike have agreed that Elon Musk can certainly dream big, but then lack on the delivery. It's why SpaceX is reported to have [delayed](#) each of its launches an average of two years each.

But this begs the question: If SpaceX has not been able to deliver on launch times, why should the market expect to see successful and timely launches in the future? How does Musk manage to stay in business?

The answer is that the market isn't the one to decide, despite the fact that SpaceX is apparently a private company. Out of all of SpaceX's contracts, NASA is documented to contribute to [85%](#) of SpaceX's revenue. Additionally, the number of direct governmental subsidies (without accounting for tax credits) climb up to about [\\$5.5 billion](#) dollars and is also peppered with [\\$200 million](#) dollars in varying governmental contracts. These estimates do not even account for the money Musk funnels in from SolarCity and Tesla, his two other ineffective companies which receive [\\$4.9 billion](#) dollars in government support by themselves.

Without the help of the government, SpaceX would not have been able to fail as many times as it has. Private investors would not tolerate Musk's reckless mismanagement, and the company would've went belly-up years ago. But, since SpaceX is essentially a built-for-government company, Capitol Hill will continue to allow Musk to waste taxpayer dollars on futile launches and projects.

Last year's failed Falcon 9 launch — the one that caused [\\$118 million](#) dollars in taxpayer-funded cargo to be blown to smoke — should have taught the government a lesson about picking “winners and losers.” The winners they think they are picking are actually losers that are stealing American family's money, and effectively stifling innovation in the market of space flight.

The excuse for the failed Falcon 9 flight fifteen months ago was, according to Elon Musk, the result of being a “little bit complacent,” as well as the failure of a third party manufacturer to produce a structural piece. Now, the Falcon 9 failed yet again, and a delusional Musk shouldered the blame on an [imaginary UFO](#) interfering with the launch.

It is inexcusable to make the same mistakes in such succession and expect that the government and the market will buy into incredulous lies, all while continuing to dole out taxpayer-funded contracts.

Meanwhile, as the government continues to fund Musk's reckless projects, SpaceX's main competitor, the [United Launch Alliance](#) (ULA), is sitting on the sidelines with an impressive 100% success rate for launches.

Tell me: why does the government continue to let Musk waste our tax dollars when the contracts can instead be given to a fully efficient competitor? It is truly mind boggling. When the government seeks contracts, it should go with the company that has the best return on investment, not with the company that gives a cheaper estimate and then continuously blows the projects up into pieces just months later.

This should especially be the case when dealing with Elon Musk, a reckless CEO that has also effectively delayed every line of his car line through [Tesla Motors](#) and turned no profit margin. It should be easy to determine the track record of a man who has historically shot for the stars, but ended up back on earth because he could not even get ten feet off the ground.

Washington should only invest in spaceflight when it understands how to make a good investment. Just because you like Elon Musk and his vision for the world does not mean that he will deliver on his promises. Actions speak louder than words, and at this point, Elon Musk's actions have spoken loudly. It is time to take a step back and ask how many of Elon Musk's promises are empty words without results.

[Failed Businesses Built  
by Elon Musk and  
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Billions](#)

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