



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

**Ranking Member Eric Sorensen (D-IL)
of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics**

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing:

*Risks and Rewards:
Encouraging Commercial Space Innovation While Maintaining Public Safety*

September 10, 2024

Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Babin, for holding today's hearing entitled "Risks and Rewards: Encouraging Commercial Space Innovation While Maintaining Public Safety." I also want to welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses. Thank you for being here.

When you grow up with a dad who is an aerospace engineer, you learn a lot about our infinite frontier. And now as Ranking Member on this subcommittee, it is our job to figure out how to make space a catalyst for inspiration as we work together to develop our STEM workforce, innovate, and grow our economy.

We rely on space systems and technologies to communicate, navigate, monitor and understand the Earth and our changing climate, and, perhaps most importantly, to discover and explore. Increasingly, space is also important to our national security.

To realize the benefits of space, we need to access space and, often, return systems back to Earth. Launch and reentry services, largely provided by the commercial sector, are the gateway.

Commercial launch and reentry services are essential to our civil, commercial, and national security activities in space.

In 1984, through this Committee's leadership, Congress granted the Secretary of Transportation authority to license commercial launch systems consistent with public health, safety of property, national security, and foreign policy interests of the United States.

The Secretary later delegated the authority to the Federal Aviation Administration. Congress has amended and updated the original statute as the industry has evolved. To date, the FAA has licensed over 700 commercial space launches that have occurred without any impact to public safety or significant impact to public property.

Mr. Chairman, that's an impressive safety record that we can all be proud of. I want to thank the public servants at the FAA for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to maintaining safety.

Of the more 700 licensed launches to date, about 40 percent have occurred in just the last three years. With the increasing number of launches, it is important the FAA keep pace in its licensing and safety services. But this is not an easy task, especially as the FAA also:

- Transitions to updated launch and reentry regulations issued in 2020;
- Navigates licenses for innovative systems and concepts of operation; and
- Monitors the emerging commercial human spaceflight industry and the eventual need for a safety framework.

Today's hearing provides an opportunity to consider how we support the FAA and the commercial space industry at-large in responding to this period of tremendous growth.

Are the new regulations meeting their intended goals? Do we have the necessary workforce, infrastructure, and resources to respond? Do we understand the implications of those activities on the environment? And are we prepared for accidents, should they occur?

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on what this Committee and Congress can do to sustain a safe, vibrant, and leading U.S. commercial space launch and reentry industry. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.