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

Opening Statement

Chairwoman Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing:
Space Situational Awareness: Key Issues in an Evolving Landscape

Tuesday, February 11, 2020

Thank you, Chairwoman Horn, for holding today's hearing on space situational awareness, and thank you to each of our witnesses for your thoughtful prepared testimony.

During the 116th Congress, the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology has been focusing on a number of complex issues, including artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, climate change, and energy innovation to name just a few. The oversight we have been conducting has helped inform our Committee's consideration of potential policy options in each of those areas. Today, the Space Subcommittee will be examining another multifaceted and complex issue—namely the sustainability of the space environment in which we and other nations carry out our space activities.

Outer space is vast. However, some of the orbits around Earth are becoming crowded, and spacecraft are becoming increasingly vulnerable to impacts from space debris. The dangers from space debris are coming at a time when nations are increasingly looking to space to support their national objectives, whether they be scientific, commercial, or national security-related.

Space situational awareness – SSA – involves collecting location data on space objects, processing that data to characterize the space environment, and developing techniques to support satellite operators so that they can avoid potential collisions in space. SSA provides the foundation for any technical or potential future regulatory measures that might be needed to ensure safe operations in space.

Of course, because the problem is global in nature, it will be essential that the United States work collaboratively with our international partners if we are to achieve a sustainable approach to dealing with the challenge posed by space debris.

There are many facets of the SSA problem that will need to be addressed. Namely, what technical capabilities are needed? How will government, commercial, and academic entities contribute to and share space situational awareness data and information? What legal and policy questions will need to be considered?

I hope that today's hearing will provide us with a good introduction to the challenges and opportunities associated with space situational awareness. I also hope to hear from our witnesses about what issues the Committee should prioritize as it begins its work on this important issue.

Our Committee's work in this complex and important area is just beginning today, and I anticipate that we will be carrying out additional hearings and oversight on space situational awareness, orbital debris, and space traffic management over the remainder of this Congress.

I again want to commend Chairwoman Horn and Ranking Member Babin for holding today's hearing, and with that I yield back.