



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

Opening Statement

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

Continuing U.S. Leadership in Commercial Space at Home and Abroad

July 13, 2023

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing on "Continuing U.S. Leadership in Commercial Space at Home and Abroad." I also want to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished witnesses. Thank you for being here.

Three years ago, during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation breathed a sigh of relief when the SpaceX Crew Dragon demonstration mission successfully and safely transported crew to the International Space Station and back home again. The United States had been dependent on Russia to deliver our astronauts to and from the ISS for nearly a decade, following the planned retirement of NASA's Space Shuttle program.

The success of that crewed demonstration mission was the culmination of years of government investment and partnership. Our nation's investments in civil space R&D, science, exploration, and utilization have advanced the underlying space capabilities and technologies that have fostered a thriving commercial space industry. I want the United States to continue to lead the world in innovative space technologies and which provide significant economic and societal benefits to our country.

Today's hearing will review the governance of our U.S. commercial space sector, if and how the frameworks this Committee has put into place are sufficient, and what is needed to not only encourage the continued growth and leadership but to meet our international obligations.

While I'm sure we all have many questions, one thing is clear. The success of the industry depends on safety. A bad day could hurt the entire commercial space industry. With that in mind, I hope we will hear from our witnesses on how we can ensure safe and responsible commercial space behaviors, which are the types of actions we want other nations to emulate. It's not only the right thing to do, it's our obligation as signatory to the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 to ensure authorization and continuing supervision of U.S. nongovernmental entities in outer space. In short, the U.S. government is responsible for what its commercial actors do in space.

The Science Committee has been at the forefront of commercial space regulations since the Commercial Space Launch Act of 1984 first directed the Department of Transportation to license

and regulate commercial space launches. The Committee also authorized regulation of private remote sensing space systems. The last major commercial space statutory update was in 2015. Since that time, commercial space activities have expanded and accelerated. Companies are placing mega constellations in space to enable broadband communications and other services. Private citizens are flying into space on both commercial suborbital and orbital spacecraft. Companies are providing in-space satellite servicing. Through NASA, commercial companies are also developing space stations for low Earth orbit and landers to deliver both scientific payloads and astronauts to the surface of the Moon. Space is a busy place, placing increasing importance on the role of space situational awareness capabilities to track space debris, satellites, and to warn operators of potential risks or collisions. Each of these areas come with issues and complexities as well as advocates with differing positions.

I hope we will have an opportunity to hear from the relevant Federal agencies on their role as the implementers of regulatory frameworks, as well as other key sectors such as the insurance industry, on what Congress needs to consider if we are to legislate in this area.

This Committee will take a thoughtful look at all the relevant information and insight as we seek to balance leadership and growth with safety and responsibility. I look forward to working with the Chairman, my colleagues in the Minority, and the Administration on any potential legislation the Committee may consider.

Thank you, and I yield back.