

OPENING STATEMENT  
**Ranking Member Donna F. Edwards (D-MD)**  
**of the Subcommittee on Space**

House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology  
Subcommittee on Space  
*“Commercial Remote Sensing: Facilitating Innovation and Leadership”*  
September 7, 2016

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing on “Commercial Remote Sensing: Facilitating Innovation and Leadership” and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses.

Since the 1980s, Congress has set policy to encourage the development of a commercial remote sensing industry as well as the government’s purchase of commercial remote sensing data, as appropriate.

The Land Remote Sensing Policy Act of 1992 established the framework for licensing and regulation of commercial remote sensing satellites under the Department of Commerce. Establishing a licensing regime was needed to fulfill our obligations under the Outer Space Treaty for supervision of non-governmental activities in space and for providing U.S. private entities with a legal mechanism for carrying out commercial space-based remote sensing operations. Subsequently, since 1996 the Department of Commerce has issued about 100 licenses for commercial remote sensing systems.

Over the past few years, the explosion in cubesats and advances in sensing capabilities have led companies to propose novel approaches to collecting space-based remote sensing data. Commercial remote sensing is now a dynamic and growing industry.

In addition, the societal benefits these data provide for such global issues as natural disasters are evident with the appearance of commercial remote sensing images in televised news and headline newspaper articles. These exciting developments, however, mean that the days of relatively straightforward license applications are over.

As part of the licensing process, novel architectures, orbital mechanics, and new sensing capabilities must undergo careful consideration across the government to assess any impacts to national security and foreign policy, and to ensure the safety of existing orbital operations. Several stakeholders, including NOAA’s Advisory Committee on Commercial Remote Sensing, have indicated that delays in approving licenses and operational constraints imposed by the licensing process may be impeding the current growth and evolution of the industry.

In fact, Title II of the Commercial Space Launch Competitiveness Act (CSLCA) that was enacted last Fall year requires a report on potential statutory updates that might be needed for licensing commercial space-based remote sensing systems. That report is due in the coming months.

I certainly hope, Mr. Chairman, that the Subcommittee will have an opportunity to examine that report with NOAA before considering any potential updates to law, policy, or regulations.

Before closing, Mr. Chairman, I want to highlight the enabling role that Federal R&D continues to have in enabling the success of this industry. It is Federal investments in remote sensing research and development, the free and open dissemination of Federally-provided remote sensing imagery, and the Federal government purchase of commercial remote sensing data that makes this vibrant industry, and its supporting value-added enterprises, possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.