



Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

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

July 13, 2023

Good morning and welcome to today's hearing, where we will discuss current and future U.S. leadership in commercial space.

From the dawn of the space age, the private sector has worked hand-in-hand with the U.S. government, but it wasn't until the liftoff of the first privately-funded space launch from United States soil in 1982 that the nation's commercial space industry truly took off.

As industry has grown and evolved over time, Congress enacted several pieces of space legislation to promote commercial space activities while upholding the international obligations of the United States.

This legislation granted the executive branch regulatory authority for certain space activities, but also charged agencies with the dual mandate of both encouraging the private sector and protecting the public and the national interests of the United States.

Today, the United States is a world-leader in commercial space activities.

The nation hosts an active market for launch and reentry services that delivers both cutting-edge payloads and astronauts to space.

Nongovernmental entities of all types and sizes now have access to capabilities that once were only available to governments and large corporations, sparking a renaissance in commercial space activity.

The private sector is expanding into territories historically dominated by national space programs, proposing business concepts that envision commercially-operated habitats in low-Earth orbit, on-orbit servicing and manufacturing, and utilization of space resources.

These are exciting developments. But new technologies present new issues for the government to consider when addressing space operations, and Congress must take a thoughtful approach on how to oversee these innovative activities without stifling progress.

One such issue is the federal government's approach towards commercial human spaceflight activities.

In the early 2000s, Congress authorized the Secretary of Transportation to regulate aspects of commercial human spaceflight, but not until after the expiration of a "learning period" that would allow industry time to grow and supply regulators with data to inform appropriate regulations.

Congress has since extended this learning period twice after determining that industry was not sufficiently mature for additional regulation. The most recent extension, granted in 2015, will expire at the end of September.

Congress must determine whether the current state of commercial human spaceflight merits an additional learning period extension, or whether to let the learning period come to an end.

Congress also must address other pressing issues for commercial space operators, including the appropriate governance structure for both new and existing space activities, and how to advance space situational awareness to maintain safe operations in orbit.

As this Committee prepares to consider commercial space legislation, it's imperative that we keep U.S. international competitiveness at the top of our priorities.

Ensuring a robust commercial space sector is key to maintaining U.S. leadership in science and technology.

Other countries, friendly and otherwise, are actively engaged in space activities. Some seek to create a favorable environment for space companies, offering incentives from both investment and regulatory perspectives.

Our legislation must be carefully written and executed to create a favorable environment here at home and prevent U.S. companies from turning to overseas destinations that promise speedy authorizations with minimal restrictions.

Maintaining U.S. leadership in space is also critical to the future of international space policy, especially as more actors become involved in space worldwide, both private and governmental.

The United States' status as a major spacefaring nation has historically secured us a key role in discussions of international norms and standards.

That has allowed us to ensure that our off-world activities embody our values: transparency, fairness, and collaboration.

I can assure you that those aren't the norms that our adversaries would establish if they were steering the development of international space policy.

If we want to continue to set the rules of the road, Congress must work hand-in-hand with the executive branch and stakeholders to ensure the U.S. maintains its status as a leader in space. Passing legislation that fosters the burgeoning commercial space industry is a key step towards this goal.

As our Committee develops this legislation we'll keep these major considerations in mind: a thoughtful regulatory environment that supports innovation, a competitive approach to grow our domestic industry, and a focus on maintaining U.S. leadership in international space policy.

Our witnesses today represent a range of stakeholder perspectives and I look forward to hearing their testimony and having a robust discussion on these important topics. I now recognize the Ranking Member for her opening statement.