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**Statement of Rep. Mo Brooks (R-Ala.)
Hearing on Space Traffic Management: How to Prevent a Real Life ‘Gravity’**

Vice Chairman Brooks: The focus of this hearing is how to prevent a real life ‘Gravity.’ As was imaginatively portrayed by Hollywood last year, the threat of debris in key orbits around the Earth is very real and a serious issue. While the movie elevated orbital debris to the forefront of the public’s attention, this committee is no stranger to the topic. Today we will continue assessing the key questions involved in space traffic management and what Congress may do to ensure the safety and security of the space environment.

There are two important facets of this discussion. The first is an assessment of what we are doing right now to track and mitigate orbital debris. The second is what more needs to be done without burdening the space industry with unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles to success.

At present, the Joint Functional Component Command for Space, or JFCC SPACE, is tracking approximately 23,000 objects in orbit around the Earth, including 4,000 payloads, of which 1,200 are active. The current systems available for tracking cannot detect object smaller than 4 inches in size. This means we can’t even track a paint fleck travelling at 17,500 miles an hour, which can cause serious damage.

The Chinese Anti-Satellite test in 2007 demonstrated just how volatile the space environment can be. This test resulted in the largest creation of debris in history. So far almost 3,400 individual objects associated with this event have been cataloged, and the list is still growing. Additionally, in 2000, the collision of a decommissioned Russian Communications Satellite dubbed Kosmos-2251 and an active U.S. communications satellite called Iridium-33 created a debris field that resulted in over 2,000 pieces of debris. Combined, these two events account for almost a quarter of all the objects JFCC is tracking.

While tracking existing debris is obviously key to this discussion, we must also focus on preventing the proliferation of these objects in the first place. There are two key agencies involved in the mitigation of debris, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Federal Communications Commission. Both of these agencies have developed regulations specific to the creation of orbital debris and I am eager to hear from them today.

The FAA is responsible for the mitigation of debris as it pertains to launch and reentry of transportation vehicles. The National Space Transportation Policy released in November of 2013 directed the Department of Transportation to execute exclusive authority over these activities. While this was not a change in the status quo, Dr. George Nield, Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation at the FAA testified before this Subcommittee that his agency was ready to start a larger discussion on an expansion of their authority to regulate on orbit activities. It is unclear what specific authority the FAA is asking for, and how it would anticipate working with other agencies to implement

this authority. Regardless of the Administration's plans, Congress will need to carefully weigh the costs and benefits of increased authority for the FAA against the possible overregulation of a still very young industry.

In 2005, the FCC asserted jurisdiction to regulate orbital debris from commercial satellites which require their licenses for the use of spectrum. The Commission based this assertion largely on the broad mandate in the Communications Act of 1934 to encourage "the larger and more effective use of radio in the public interest." Although Congress has not provided authority for this type of regulation explicitly, there seems to be some ambiguity in the nature of their mandate to utilize the spectrum effective and efficiently.

The efforts of federal agencies should be viewed within the context of separate international and private sector efforts. The United States has the most advanced space situational awareness system in the world, but tracking and cataloging the space environment more effectively may come from key partnerships. We cannot afford to ignore these important partners.

As commercial human spaceflight increases in the coming decades, we must be sure that the nation can protect the health, welfare, and safety of our government astronauts and private spaceflight participants. It is also imperative that we secure key orbits to protect assets that are critical to our economy. Similarly, we cannot allow national security assets that are used to keep our country safe to be threatened by the proliferation of debris.

The debris events caused by the Kosmos and Iridium collision in 2009 and China's ASAT test in 2007 demonstrated that the space environment is vulnerable and ever changing. We must be vigilant to ensure our national interests are protected.

I appreciate the appearance of our witnesses today and I look forward to hearing from them.###