



## COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE SPACE & TECHNOLOGY REPUBLICANS

### **Opening Statement of Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Ranking Member Brian Babin**

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing - Space Situational Awareness: Guiding  
the Transition to a Civil Capability

*May 12, 2022*

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This Committee has focused on Space Situational Awareness, or “SSA,” for several years. We’ve held numerous hearings and considered two significant pieces of legislation: the American Space Commerce Free Enterprise Act, which passed the House by voice vote, and the American Space Situational Awareness and Framework for Entity Management Act. These efforts by the Committee informed the development of Space Policy Directive 3, which called for the Department of Defense to transfer its current responsibility to share SSA data to the Department of Commerce.

The debris created by a recent Russian anti-satellite test highlights why SSA remains an important issue. As I said at our Subcommittee’s hearing in 2020, near-misses in space attract media attention and calls for draconian regulations, but overreacting could be just as detrimental to our nation’s space enterprise. There are, however, some important issues I think we can all still agree on.

First, we need better data. The information the government and private sector rely on to make sound decisions needs to be improved. Uncertainty is too high, which could lead to unnecessary alerts and unpredicted conjunctions. As a result, the private sector is stepping up to the plate. They are developing cost-effective, timely, and accurate SSA data and services, often relying on off-the-shelf and non-military technologies. In some cases, commercial capabilities are superior to DoD’s. This is good news for America and for the global community, and we should foster the growth of these nascent industries.

Secondly, the Department of Commerce is the right agency for the job. I am closely following Commerce's plans to stand up this capability. They don't need to create a bloated bureaucracy. Nor should they duplicate DoD's existing architecture or reinvent the wheel by building new systems and sensors. They should just be a "commercial storefront" that takes the government's data, integrates it with any necessary commercial and operator data, and makes that information available to the public through commercial architectures. We aren't ready for "Space Traffic Management" or a "traffic cop in space."

Instead, we should elevate the Office of Space Commerce out of NOAA so that they can better coordinate across the Department, throughout the government, and internationally. Commerce already houses several agencies that are relevant to space - NIST, BIS, ITA, NTIA, the National Weather Service, and NOAA. Elevating the Office is key to their long-term success.

Commerce also has a history of partnering with the private sector to nurture emerging industries. Commerce stood up the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) through a contract with a non-profit organization. ICANN was the organization responsible for developing policies, coordinating best practices, and managing the processes that led to a stable internet.

We've already seen the space community adopt a similar approach on their own. Several years ago, operators founded the Space Data Association to share information and improve safety. The SDA demonstrates how the private sector can collaborate and innovate. More recently, the Space Safety Coalition was established to provide similar capabilities for operators in low Earth orbit.

The third issue we should all agree on is that we need to develop better standards and practices. Rather than imposing a top-down regulatory burden on an emerging sector, we should adopt a crawl, walk, run approach. NASA, while not a regulator, has a long history of demonstrating responsible behavior and researching orbital mechanics. NASA, along with academia and the private sector, can play an important role in

advancing our understanding of the orbital domain as well as facilitating the development of non-binding consensus-based standards, best practices, and customs.

This could be done similar to how NASA developed internal Orbital Debris Mitigation Standard Practices that eventually informed the international Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee's Space Debris Mitigation Guidelines. These standards and best practices could also be augmented by contributions from the insurance industry, similar to the role they played in the early days of maritime shipping.

We have a lot to learn about how to operate in space, but I am optimistic. I believe we can all work together to ensure space remains a safe and prosperous domain without smothering the private sector with burdensome regulations or crowding-out commercial solutions.

Thank you and I look forward to an interesting panel.