Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing
Leveraging Commercial Innovation for Lunar Exploration: A Review of NASA's CLPS Initiative
April 1, 2025

Thank you for holding a hearing on this important topic, Mr. Chairman.

A recurring theme in this Committee's recent hearings is NASA's collaboration with the private sector. Historically, NASA has opted to procure hardware from its contractors. However, this shifted with the growth of our commercial space industry.

NASA launched the Commercial Crew and Cargo programs to leverage the capabilities of emerging space companies.

Through these programs, NASA purchased private sector launch and reentry capabilities as a commercial service.

As the United States expands its activities beyond low-Earth orbit, it is time to consider whether similar procurement models should be applied to activities in cislunar space.

One such model is the Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative, or CLPS. Under CLPS, NASA buys lunar delivery services from U.S. companies that build and operate their own robotic landers. NASA obtains these capabilities using a service-based contract model, and providers are responsible for ensuring end-to-end services for lunar delivery.

Under a service-based contract, NASA has limited insight and oversight into the performance of these operations.

Traditionally, NASA has significant input into the design and execution of a mission, normally taking great pains to mitigate the risks associated with it. CLPS is unique in this respect.

Instead, NASA reduces its risk exposures by selecting CLPS payloads that are scientifically valuable yet smaller and more cost-effective—then it distributes them across multiple missions. In other words, NASA understands and accepts the possibility that a CLPS mission may fail, an approach informally referred to as taking "shots on goal."

NASA had three key objectives for the CLPS initiative. First, enable frequent landings of scientific instruments that can target a range of lunar destinations, providing scientists with diverse data and fulfilling decadal priorities.

Second, to use science and technology demonstration payloads hosted on CLPS missions to support NASA's Artemis program.

Third, to assist commercial lunar landing service providers, with the goal of making these services more affordable for both NASA and other customers.

NASA seeks to open access to the lunar surface and, hopefully, promote the growth of a lunar economy where it is one of many customers.

However, CLPS has faced its share of challenges. The initiative has suffered from increased costs and schedule delays, partially driven by NASA's decision to manifest its VIPER spacecraft as a CLPS payload. NASA has also struggled to establish a stable set of requirements for the landing services and to accept risk as intended.

So far, three providers have launched four missions under the CLPS program, with varying levels of success.

This hearing presents the Committee with the opportunity to review the first seven years of CLPS and address important questions, such as whether the program is meeting NASA's initial goals, how it supports NASA's science and technology development priorities, and more.

Today, we will hear from both NASA and CLPS providers about the practical implementation of the initiative, the adjustments made to it over time, and whether additional changes could improve the program. We can also explore whether the successes and lessons learned from CLPS could inform future commercial procurements at NASA, particularly as this Committee works to foster the growth of a thriving U.S. space industry.

I look forward to hearing from each of our witnesses and understanding the perspectives of both customers and providers. I'm also eager to learn whether policy changes could benefit CLPS, NASA, and the commercial industry moving forward. Thank you for your time this morning.