Opening Statement of Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Chairman Mike Haridopolos

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

I want to welcome everyone to today's subcommittee hearing.

This hearing, like our last, is focused on NASA's return to the Moon this decade.

Today's topic is a review of NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative, more commonly known as CLPS.

The world marveled at the stunning imagery captured last month by Firefly Aerospace's Blue Ghost lander and Intuitive Machine's Athena lander—lunar sunrises and sunsets, Earthrises, and even a solar eclipse seen from the surface of the Moon.

But behind the beauty was purpose: These missions are advancing scientific discovery and paving the way for American astronauts to return to the Moon in the increasingly near future.

Unlike during the Apollo program, NASA is returning to the Moon with the help of commercial and international partners.

As we heard at our last hearing, the Artemis program will involve NASA purchasing services from commercial vendors instead of owning all assets itself.

One key area where NASA is applying this strategy is by partnering with commercial providers for science missions around the Moon and to its surface.

There is still much to learn about the Moon before we return. Engaging in science missions now will enable our astronauts to conduct better science when they are on the lunar surface.

The rationale for CLPS is simple: instead of developing its own lunar lander, NASA acquires payload delivery services to the lunar surface.

This program also promotes collaboration with U.S. commercial vendors to support NASA's lunar exploration goals, ensuring that the technology and services are developed domestically.

For the selection process, NASA chooses from a group of U.S.-based providers for missions to various regions of the Moon. These providers are responsible for supplying end-to-end services, from launch to operating the lander on the lunar surface.

Under CLPS, NASA can be one of multiple payloads sent to the Moon, allowing companies to fill excess capacity however they deem appropriate.

Additionally, CLPS provides an opportunity for other mission directorates within NASA to prove out technologies before humans return to the Moon.

However, NASA assumes increased risk by taking this commercial approach. Not every mission has been successful to date, and several instruments have not been successfully tested as a result.

We have seen providers go out of business, schedule delays, and cost increases associated with CLPS.

To date, NASA has issued 11 task orders for 50 instruments to be delivered to the lunar surface by 2028.

We've now had four CLPS missions, including two landing attempts, in the last month. I will note that all of these launches occurred from Florida's Space Coast.

These launches give Congress an opportunity to evaluate whether CLPS has operated as intended and whether this committee should consider directing future changes to the program.

The subcommittee will also hear lessons learned from NASA and our commercial providers, exploring whether this innovative approach to partnering with the commercial sector could be applied to other areas of the agency.

We are joined today by the three companies that have launched CLPS missions to date.

- Firefly Aerospace
- Astrobotic Technologies
- Intuitive Machines

Their insights into how they have partnered with NASA, as well as their future plans, will benefit the subcommittee, and I look forward to hearing their feedback and recommendations.

I thank all of our witnesses for joining us today. I look forward to a productive discussion.