U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON

SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Valerie Foushee (D-NC)

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing:

"The Future of Low Earth Orbit: From the ISS to Commercial Platforms"

March 25, 2026

Good morning and thank you Chairman Haridopolos for holding today's hearing on the future of low Earth orbit, or LEO. I want to welcome our witnesses and thank you for being here.

When John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth in 1962, we could not have imagined that the United States would one day build an orbiting laboratory, or support **continuous human presence there for 25 years, a milestone reached last November.**

Today, the **International Space Station (ISS)** is one of NASA's greatest achievements. It remains the largest orbiting research laboratory in space— a shining example of international collaboration—advancing science, strengthening partnerships, and enabling the next era of exploration. It has deepened our understanding of living and working in space and served as a proving ground for technologies needed beyond LEO.

But the ISS is aging. Technical risks are increasing, including cracks, leaks, and growing maintenance needs, and the long-term safety of its operations is not guaranteed.

NASA plans to transition to commercial platforms by 2030, yet we still lack a clear and credible plan to get there.

This is not a new concept. We have known the ISS is a perishable asset that has long exceeded its 15-year design life. Despite multiple hearings on the transition as well as statutory direction, today, key questions we have been asking about our future in low Earth orbit remain unanswered, including on: How we will acquire commercial platforms, NASA's requirements for the platforms, the timeline for their availability, what resources NASA will need to support them, and the risk of a potential gap in U.S. presence in LEO.

That uncertainty is not acceptable for a global leader in space. A gap in U.S. presence in LEO is not just a technical risk, it is a strategic failure.

Leadership requires a clear strategy, sustained investment, and a realistic transition plan. We must also recognize that LEO is becoming an arena of strategic competition. If we fail to lead and shape this future, others—particularly our adversaries—will.

At the same time, LEO offers real opportunity. LEO is also a testbed for AI-enabled science and advanced computing that will shape both our economy and national security.

From leveraging microgravity to advance quantum technologies—such as the **Space Entanglement and Annealing Quantum Experiment** led by a university team on the ISS—to advancing pharmaceutical research, and mitigating space radiation risks, LEO is a powerful platform for discovery and innovation.

Realizing that opportunity requires investing in people. We need a strong workforce pipeline, expanded access for HBCUs and MSIs, and continued support for student research and training programs that connect education to equitable pathways into high-quality aerospace jobs.

These opportunities help students and young professionals gain the skills to turn ideas into innovation, economic impact, and benefits that can serve all Americans.

As Ranking Member, I remain focused on ensuring NASA has the resources, workforce, and direction it needs to lead the future of LEO, while ensuring the benefits we derive from our efforts in LEO and beyond are equitably deployed to all Americans.

We cannot afford to get this transition wrong. The future of U.S. leadership in space depends on it.

I would be remiss if I did not mention that just yesterday the NASA Administrator publicly announced the potential for significant changes to NASA's approach to the ISS transition. I look forward to hearing the details of those potential changes from our NASA witness this morning.

Thank you, and I yield back.