



Opening Statement of Chairman Mike Haridopolos

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing
The Future of Low Earth Orbit: From the ISS to Commercial Platforms
March 25, 2026

Good morning. I want to welcome everyone to today's hearing.

As America prepares to send astronauts farther from Earth than ever before during the Artemis II mission, we are entering a new era of space exploration—one that will define America's leadership for decades to come.

But leadership in space is not just about how far we go; it is also about how strong we stay closer to home.

That is why today's hearing focuses on America's future in low Earth orbit.

If you were born after November 2, 2000, you have never known a world without NASA astronauts living and working aboard the International Space Station.

For over 25 years, the space station's location in low Earth orbit has provided access to a unique microgravity environment that enables research that is not possible on Earth.

Research, that is cutting-edge, advancing our collective knowledge, and improving life here on Earth.

Every day, vital research conducted on the ISS paves the way for future exploration of the Moon, Mars, and beyond.

Over time, we learn more about the long-term effects of space on the human body, and we can test and improve the technologies that will enable deep space exploration.

But the International Space Station is aging, and we must begin preparing for what comes next.

That is why Congress directed NASA to extend ISS operations, ensuring the station remains operational through 2030.

NASA plans to take the space station down in 2031. By then, the goal is to move its research to new space stations built by American companies.

NASA is currently helping these companies through its Commercial Low Earth Orbit Development program.

The idea is simple: instead of running its own space station, NASA would become a customer—paying for space and services on commercial stations. That keeps research going while lowering costs for taxpayers.

Today's hearing will focus on a few key questions.

- Is the space station safe to operate until 2030 and beyond?
- How will NASA transition the ISS to the commercial space stations?
- Once this change occurs, what will be the demand outside of NASA to keep these stations running?

These are important questions as we approach the end of the International Space Station.

Today, we face challenges from China.

In 2021, China launched own space station named Tiangong.

It is smaller and not built by international partners like the ISS, it is expected to stay in orbit longer.

The takeaway is simple: America must lead in low Earth orbit.

Only Congress, the Trump Administration, and American companies working together can ensure that the United States stays in the lead for years and decades ahead.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today and sharing their expertise with the subcommittee.

I look forward to a productive discussion on the challenges ahead.