



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON  
**SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

Opening Statement

**Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)**

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 Mr. Chairman, for holding today’s hearing. I also want to thank our expert witnesses for being here.

The International Space Station (ISS) is an incredible feat of technical achievement and international cooperation. For over twenty-five years, humans have continuously occupied the Station, with NASA astronauts living and working in space alongside international partner astronauts. The ISS has served—and continues to serve—as a platform for experiments in nearly every scientific discipline: from astronomy, to atmospheric science, to particle physics, to microbiology, and so much more. Research on the ISS helps NASA understand the risks of spaceflight and test out ways to reduce that risk.

ISS does not just advance discovery and human spaceflight. Research leveraging the unique, sometimes extreme, environment on board the ISS helps improve life here on the ground. It has helped us understand the mechanisms of certain diseases and find better treatments, for example.

Operating such a complex facility well beyond its original design lifetime while maintaining a productive R&D portfolio is not without challenges. The last two years have seen many such challenges—some of them externally imposed, and some of them self-inflicted. Of recent concern is the Boeing Starliner mishap—which, thankfully, ended with the astronauts and the Station itself safe and healthy—but we also have seen existential budgetary threats from the Trump Administration, a cargo vehicle damaged in shipping even before reaching the launch pad, and the first-ever medical evacuation of a NASA crew from the Station, just to name a few.

I commend NASA and the ISS Program in its response to these challenges, even though they will mean some incredibly difficult self-reflection and culture change.

As we look to the future, operating the ISS and sustaining a U.S. presence in low Earth orbit will not get any easier. The demands of continuing to operate and fully utilize an aging station are already competing with the need to prepare to safely deorbit the Station and develop and certify one or more commercially-operated platforms. I am concerned that we are heading down a path where we squander the remaining years of the ISS, only to end up footing the bill as the primary customer for privately-owned space stations that are inherently less capable than the ISS.

Despite many hearings before this Committee and direction in statute, NASA “lacks a clearly defined and executable path to transition to a CLD before or immediately after the ISS [end of life],” according to the latest annual report of the Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel, or ASAP.

Yesterday, Administrator Isaacman announced that NASA is considering adding an additional potential strategy, one that is a more phased approach to the transition to commercial LEO services than what we have been hearing about from NASA for the last decade. I look forward to learning more about this fresh approach from our NASA witness today, and getting an initial take on the implications from our other expert witnesses.

Frankly, we are running out of time. Many of the questions we have today are the same that we have been asking at these hearings for years. NASA needs a stable, robust, executable plan, and NASA needs to execute on it.

Thank you, and I yield back.