



Opening Statement of Chairman Brian Babin

Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing
A Review of the Office of Space Commerce's Mission Authorization Proposal
Wednesday, July 15, 2026

Good morning—I thank Chairman Haridopolos for holding this important hearing.

Since the days of Apollo, America's leadership in space has been powered by its innovative commercial sector. While NASA and other government agencies remain indispensable partners, they increasingly serve as customers rather than operators. As private space activity continues to expand, America's commercial space industry has become more essential than ever to maintaining our nation's global leadership. We should not, however, take that leadership for granted.

As other nations, particularly China under the Chinese Communist Party, seek to overtake us in space, we must ensure that American innovators are competing against our adversaries—not against unnecessary government bureaucracy.

Today, we will examine a topic that has long been of interest to me: government authorization and supervision of private space activities. While the Federal Aviation Administration, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Department of Commerce each have statutory authority to regulate specific types of space activities, a growing number of nongovernmental space activities do not clearly fall within these existing frameworks.

Although the United States has long upheld its obligations under the Outer Space Treaty to authorize and supervise the activities of its nationals in outer space, the commercial space industry has told us for years that the lack of a clear regulatory pathway has discouraged investment and slowed the development of novel space activities.

In 2017, Representative Lamar Smith, then-Chairman of the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee, introduced the American Space Commerce Free Enterprise Act to address this issue. The bill sought to establish a clear, light-touch framework for the Department of Commerce to affirm that nongovernmental space activities not addressed by existing regulatory frameworks were consistent with the United States' obligations under the Outer Space Treaty with respect to private actors. The bill passed the House in 2018, but it did not make it to the President's desk before the end of the 115th Congress.

Just last Congress, I introduced the Commercial Space Act of 2023, which similarly gave the Department of Commerce authority to issue certifications for space object operations through a streamlined, minimally burdensome process.

Many of us have long argued that, given its experience licensing private remote sensing activities and its statutory direction to “foster the conditions for the economic growth and technological advancement of the United States space commerce industry,” the Office of Space Commerce is the appropriate agency to exercise such authority.

While Congress has continued to consider the appropriate path forward, President Trump took action last August by signing Executive Order 14335, which directed the Department of Commerce to propose its own approach to mission authorization.

Commerce published the latest version of its Space Commerce Certification proposal in March, outlining a voluntary process for authorizing novel commercial space activities that it calls “Space Commerce Certification.”

The proposal offers several benefits. First, it seeks to “articulate specific, light-touch requirements” for space activities. The Office of Space Commerce would then conduct due diligence on each application while coordinating the interagency review process.

The certification would not infringe on the existing authorities of other agencies. Instead, it is intended to provide a means for other regulators to satisfy portions of their own review processes, further streamlining the path to approval. The Office also anticipates rapidly iterating on the certification framework as it processes applications, particularly for different categories of novel space activities.

Today’s hearing will allow us to learn more about this proposal and how it compares to past legislative efforts, including the American Space Commerce Free Enterprise Act and the Commercial Space Act of 2023.

It will also allow us to consider whether this proposed approach fully meets the needs of the commercial space sector, or whether legislative action is needed to codify the Department of Commerce’s authority over these activities.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we will consider whether this proposed process, while thorough, avoids establishing unnecessary or burdensome requirements for operators and imposing barriers to industry innovation.

I know that Director Jordan and his staff have put an extraordinary amount of work and thought into developing this proposed approach, and I look forward to hearing from him about that effort today.