Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

No bucks. No Buck Rogers. The latest FY2026 bill from the House Appropriations Committee preserves NASA's budget at current levels, and Reps. Bacon and Chu urged House appropriators to protect NASA funding in the upcoming Continuing Resolution. Meanwhile, the American Enterprise Institute reports that the Golden Dome initiative could cost well above the White House's projections.

U.S.-China continue to square off on space, with NASA imposing new employment restrictions on Chinese nationals and China offering satellite launch services to developing nations as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

All this and more in this edition of Akin's Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update.

Akin Spotlight

Akin's **Trump Executive Order Tracker** provides a high-level overview of executive orders published by the new administration. These orders cut across dozens of industries and topics. The Tracker is updated as orders and Akin's in-depth analysis of specific orders are published.

Please visit Akin's **Trump Executive Order Overview** to view a matrix of the orders.

On The Hill

Articles and Quotes

House Appropriators Approve FY2026 Budget for NASA (*Space Policy Online*)
The House Appropriations Committee approved its fiscal year (FY) 2026 Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS) bill on September 10, keeping the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) budget at $24.8 billion, which is the same level as FY2025 and a rejection of the Trump administration's proposed 24.3% cut. The committee prioritized human space exploration, providing more funding than both the Senate and the administration's request for that mission area. The bill also included $300 million to continue the Mars Sample Return program, which the

administration had proposed to terminate. Additional language in the manager's amendment supported missions such as New Horizons, Juno, Chandra and ULTRASAT, and preserved investments in wind tunnel infrastructure and vertical lift technologies. The amendment added $3 million for a new Deep Space Food Challenge and directed NASA to assess workforce gaps and cross-directorate technology needs. An effort by Rep. Joe Morelle (D-NY) to block the mandated $85 million transfer of a space shuttle to Texas was defeated. The bill passed the committee on a party-line vote of 34 to 28 and was the final fiscal year 2026 appropriations bill to advance out of committee.

House Passes FY2026 NDAA (*Space Policy Online*)
The House passed the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) on September 10, authorizing funding for the U.S. Space Force and broader Department of Defense (DoD) operations. The legislation, titled the Streamlining Procurement for Effective Execution and Delivery and National Defense Authorization Act, combines the NDAA with the Streamlining Procurement for Effective Execution and Delivery and National Defense Authorization (SPEED) Act, a bipartisan effort to reform defense acquisition. The bill passed 231 to 196, with 17 Democrats joining most Republicans and four Republicans voting no. While only 298 of the 1,170 proposed amendments were allowed to proceed, two space-related amendments were adopted. One, offered by Rep. George Whitesides (D-CA), mandates a report on the upper atmosphere and near-space environment, while another by Rep. Neal Dunn (R-FL) calls for a study on incorporating commercial and state-operated spaceports into national security launch infrastructure. A Democratic amendment seeking to block the transfer of a space vehicle, widely assumed to be Space Shuttle Discovery, from Virginia to Texas was not permitted for floor debate. Although the NDAA authorizes funding levels, actual appropriations must still be made by the House and Senate appropriations committees.

Senate NDAA Delights Defense Startups (*Politico*)
The Senate's version of the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act has drawn praise from emerging defense companies for its provisions aimed at accelerating the DoD's acquisition process. In particular, startups support the inclusion of the Fostering Reform and Government Efficiency in Defense (FoRGED) Act, led by Senate Armed Services Chairman Roger Wicker, which focuses on helping nontraditional firms transition from prototypes to full-scale Pentagon contracts. The House-passed version of the NDAA includes the SPEED Act, a broader acquisition reform bill backed by Armed Services Chairman Mike Rogers and Ranking Member Adam Smith, which also appeals to the tech sector but is viewed as more beneficial to traditional contractors. The Senate bill additionally authorizes multiyear contracts and includes funding for advanced technologies like hypersonics and artificial intelligence (AI). As House and Senate lawmakers prepare to reconcile the two versions, Senate aides expect their chamber to take the lead in negotiations, particularly in removing controversial provisions inserted into the House bill. Final passage remains pending as floor action has stalled amid unrelated disputes over Senate rules for confirming nominees.

Reps. Bacon, Chu Lead Colleagues in Urging House Appropriators to Explicitly Protect NASA Funding in Upcoming Continuing Resolution (Rep. Don Bacon Press Release)
On September 16, Reps. Don Bacon (R-NE) and Judy Chu (D-CA) led a bipartisan letter urging

House Appropriators to include a NASA funding anomaly in the upcoming Continuing Resolution (CR) to prevent the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) from prematurely implementing proposed FY2026 budget cuts. The letter warns that absent explicit language, OMB could move forward with deep reductions, particularly to space science programs, as early as October 1, risking billions in sunk investments, weakening national security and surrendering U.S. leadership in space. The lawmakers emphasized that the FY2026 President's Budget Request would affect nearly every congressional district and urged Appropriators to reaffirm congressional intent by protecting NASA funding at no less than the FY2024/2025 enacted levels. The letter was supported by The Planetary Society and reflects broad bipartisan concern over preserving critical NASA programs through FY2026.

Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

Rep. Jason Crow (D-CO) has **introduced** the Quad Space Act (**H.R. 5175**), which requires the Secretary of Defense to initiate discussions, through the Quad, with Australia, India and Japan to identify mutual areas of interest with respect to the formulation of best practices in space, cooperation on space situational awareness, and space industrial policy.

Rep. Robert Garcia (D-CA) has **introduced** the Safe Airspace for Americans Act (**H.R. 5231**), which requires the FAA Administrator to establish procedures and reporting requirements for incidents relating to unidentified anomalous phenomena.

Rep. Young Kim (R-CA) has **introduced** the PROFIT Act (**H.R. 5248**), which establishes within the Department of State an Assistant Secretary for Water, Environment and Space Affairs to lead U.S. foreign policy on civil and commercial space governance, international space law and diplomacy, satellite services and space situational awareness.

Rep. Keith Self (R-TX) has **introduced** a bill to provide for the International Security Affairs authorities of the Department of State (**H.R. 5247**), which establishes within the Department of State an Under Secretary for International Security Affairs and related bureaus and assistant secretaries to oversee arms control, nonproliferation, political-military affairs, counterterrorism, narcotics and law enforcement, and emerging threats, including in outer space, polar and undersea domains.

Rep. Jasmine Crockett (D-TX) has **introduced** a bill to make revisions in title 51, United States Code, as necessary to keep the title current, and to make technical amendments to improve the United States Code (**H.R. 5174**), which revises and updates title 51, United States Code, to ensure the title remains current, reorganizes and modernizes provisions relating to aeronautics and space programs, and enacts new authorities for facilities, infrastructure, technology, spaceports, commercial cargo and crew transportation, International Space Station utilization, and human space flight and exploration. The bill was **ordered to be reported** by voice vote by the House Committee on the Judiciary.

Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY) has **introduced** the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2026 (**H.R. 5342**), which makes Appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026. The measure was **approved** by the House Appropriations Committee with a vote of 34 to 28 and **placed on the Union Calendar**, no. 228.

*Please find our Space Legislation Tracker **here**.*

Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(September 3, 2025 - September 26, 2025)

On September 3, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation (CST) held a **hearing** titled "Bad Moon on the Rise: Why Congress and NASA Must Thwart China in the Space Race."

On September 4, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On September 9, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On September 10, the House Appropriations Committee (HAC) held a **markup** of the FY2026 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Bill (**H.R. 5342**).

Also on September 10, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) held a closed **markup** of the Intelligence Authorization Act for FY2026 (**H.R. 5167**).

Also on September 10, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On September 16, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On September 17, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On September 18, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) held a **hearing** to consider nominations.

In the White House/Executive Branch

Articles and Quotes

Duffy's Moon Messaging (*Politico*)

NASA Acting Administrator Sean Duffy is stepping up efforts to rally support for the Artemis program amid proposed funding cuts that have sparked bipartisan concern in Congress. In a recent video message, Duffy emphasized the urgency of returning to the Moon before China, while defending the administration's plan to phase out the Space Launch System (SLS) after Artemis III in favor of commercial alternatives. Lawmakers, however, are pushing back, with both House and Senate bills rejecting the proposed cuts and preserving SLS funding, including an additional $10 billion secured by Sen. Ted Cruz for Artemis missions and the Lunar Gateway. Duffy has acknowledged the program's high costs and suggested trimming expenses, such as eliminating the rocket's second stage. Meanwhile, the broader space landscape is evolving: SpaceX has acquired EchoStar to strengthen its broadband capabilities, and NASA has imposed new employment restrictions on Chinese nationals, escalating tensions in the U.S.–China lunar rivalry.

Effective Golden Dome Would Cost Far More Than Projected, Report Finds (*National Defense Magazine*)
A new report from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) warns that the Trump administration's Golden Dome missile defense initiative could cost as much as $3.6 trillion, vastly exceeding the $175 billion projected by the White House. The report, authored by AEI's Todd Harrison, outlines six potential system architectures with varying costs and capabilities, concluding that any configuration capable of defending against the full spectrum of missile, drone and aircraft threats would require dramatic new investments beyond current baseline defense spending. While Trump has framed Golden Dome as a nearly foolproof homeland shield reminiscent of Reagan-era missile defense ambitions, the AEI analysis highlights the trade-offs between geographic coverage, system resilience and budget constraints. Even the least expensive option, at $252 billion over 20 years, would provide only limited tactical defense for select regions. Harrison emphasizes that the final cost will hinge less on technical feasibility than on political decisions about risk tolerance and strategic priorities. Congress initially approved $25 billion for the program in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, but the report underscores that far more funding would be needed to meet the administration's ambitious goals.

Space Force Building Tools to Detect Cyberattacks on Satellites (*Air and Space Forces*)
The U.S. Space Force is developing an artificial intelligence-powered tool to detect cyberattacks on satellites by analyzing onboard telemetry and behavior in real time. Unlike conventional cybersecurity measures that focus on ground-based networks and encrypted communications, the tool monitors anomalies in satellite systems such as reaction wheels and batteries to identify potential intrusions. It uses machine learning models trained on synthetic telemetry data representing both normal operations and cyberattack scenarios. The tool is designed to detect attacks even when compromised systems report normal telemetry, offering resilience against sophisticated threats. It is expected to be available next year and will be marketed to both government and commercial satellite operators, with the goal of improving the cybersecurity posture of space-based assets as threats to orbital infrastructure continue to grow.

Federal Agency Space News

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Space Station Science (September 17, 2025)

NASA Sets Launch Coverage for Space Weather Missions (September 15, 2025)

Crew Awaits Second Cargo Mission in Less Than a Week; Keeps Up Biotech Research (September 15, 2025)

NASA, War Department Partnership Tests Boundaries of Autonomous Drone Operations (September 12, 2025)

U.S. Space Force

Space Development Agency Completes Successful Launch of First Tranche 1 Satellite (September 11, 2025)

Air Force, Space Force Join Federal Push to Modernize IT Service Delivery, Strengthen Readiness (September 10, 2025)

The White House

Memorandum of Understanding Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland Regarding the Technology Prosperity Deal (September 18, 2025)

International

Articles & Quotes

China's Space Advances Threaten U.S. Lead in 5-10 Years (*WebProNews*)
A new report from the Progressive Policy Institute warns that China is rapidly narrowing the gap with the United States in space capabilities and could overtake U.S. leadership within five to ten years without increased investment and strategic focus. The analysis highlights China's growing strength in reusable rocket technology, satellite constellations and lunar missions such as Chang'e-6, which returned samples from the moon's far side in 2024. China's timeline to land astronauts on the moon by 2030 directly challenges NASA's delayed Artemis program. In addition to technological advances, China is expanding its global influence through space diplomacy, offering satellite launch services to developing nations as part of its Belt and Road Initiative. Its commercial space sector now includes over 500 companies, and its near-Earth asteroid and deep space missions rival U.S. efforts. Experts stress that the U.S. must counter this momentum with increased funding, reduced bureaucratic barriers and renewed focus on innovation. The strategic

implications are significant, with China's breakthroughs in satellite communications, hypersonic systems and 6G technologies positioning it for dominance unless the U.S. acts decisively.

Russia Developing Starlink Rival at 'Rapid Pace,' Space Chief Says (*Reuters*)
Russia is accelerating development of a domestic low-Earth orbit satellite internet system to rival Starlink, with officials confirming that test satellites are already in orbit and production models are being modified. The head of Roscosmos emphasized the need to abandon institutional inertia and attract young talent to compete in a rapidly evolving commercial space landscape. The project builds on lessons learned from past failures and misjudgments, including dismissing early commercial space players like Elon Musk. While details remain limited, Russia's new broadband satellite initiative aims to reassert its influence in space-based communications after years of decline, and to reduce reliance on Western technologies—particularly as Starlink remains widely used in conflict zones, including by Ukrainian forces.

Constellations of Power: Smart Dragon-3 and the Geopolitics of China's Space Strategy (*Space Daily*)
On September 9, China launched 11 Geely-05 satellites aboard a Smart Dragon-3 rocket from a maritime platform near Rizhao City, underscoring the integration of commercial innovation with its national space strategy. The Geely constellation, designed to deliver global Internet of Things (IoT) connectivity, represents a key element of Beijing's broader civil-military fusion agenda by reducing reliance on foreign satellite systems and enhancing secure communications infrastructure. The Smart Dragon-3, optimized for low Earth orbit constellation deployment, adds operational flexibility with sea-based launches. Strategically, the expansion of China's satellite networks enhances economic leverage, intelligence-gathering capabilities and military resilience, while contributing to a bifurcated global digital infrastructure. The dual-use nature of this technology and the increasing role of private firms aligned with state goals reflect a deliberate push to dominate space-based systems. As China accelerates the deployment of broadband, navigation and remote sensing constellations, the implications for orbital congestion, international governance and geopolitical competition continue to grow.

Check out below for comment opportunities, requests for proposals, notices of proposed rulemaking and a look at the week ahead in space events:

Comment Opportunities (RFIs)

Global Communications Backhaul Solution
Department of Defense
Close Date: September 30, 2025

Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory (NBL) Facility Commercial Utilization
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: November 28, 2025

Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

Program and Analysis Control (PAAC VI) Support Services
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: October 1, 2025

Space Weather Geostationary (SWGEO) PHOtospheric Magnetograph Imager (PHOMI) Phase A Study
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: October 12, 2025

Mechanical Engineering Support and Assistance (MESA)
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: October 14, 2025

Proposal for Lease of the Flight Research Facility (Hangar) at Glenn Research Center (GRC)
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: December 13, 2025

Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed rules.

Upcoming Space Events

2025 Air, Space & Cyber Convention
AFA
September 22-24, 2025

The 42nd International Communications Satellite Systems Conference
ICSSC
September 23-25, 2025

Artemis II Mission Overview And S&T Briefings
NASA
September 23, 2025

Rocket Dreams: Musk, Bezos, and the Inside Story of the New, Trillion-Dollar Space Race
AEI
September 24, 2025

2025 International Astronautical Congress
IAF
September 29 - October 3, 2025

International Observe the Moon Night
NASA
October 4, 2025

The Day of Action to Save NASA Science
The Planetary Society
October 4-6, 2025

International Mars Society Convention
The Mars Society
October 9-11, 2025

9th Interstellar Symposium
IRG/IAA
October 12-15, 2025

XRISM International Conference 2025
XRISM
October 20-24, 2025

The 7th Summit for Space Sustainability
Secure World Foundation
October 22-23, 2025

Planetary Science Conference 2025
Jagiellonian University
October 23-25, 2025

New Worlds 2025 Conference and Space Cowboy Ball
New Worlds
October 24-25, 2025

von Braun Space Exploration Symposium
American Astronautical Society
October 27-29, 2025

19th ESPI Autumn Conference
European Space Policy Institute
October 28-29, 2025

Defence in Space (DiSC) 2025
GSOA
October 28-29, 2025

Silicon Valley Space Week
SVSW
October 28-30, 2025

Space Settlement Summit
NSS
November 3-4, 2025

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Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

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