



## Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

*Congress rang in the new year by unveiling a three-bill minibus funding package that rejects many of the administration's proposed space and science cuts, the White House published an EO threatening restrictions on defense contractor spending and NASA put the throttles forward on an infrastructure overhaul intended to enable the next generation of exploration. Outside the U.S., the ESA suffered a data breach, cosmonauts appear to have sealed the leaks in the ISS's Russian module and China performed a ton of on-orbit science during 2025.*

*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

##### [Congress Rejects Trump's Cuts to NASA \(Politico\)](#)

Congress has rejected the Trump administration's proposed \$6 billion cut to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), instead advancing a bipartisan minibus appropriations package that allocates \$24.4 billion to the agency for fiscal year (FY) 2026. The bill restores funding for science programs (\$7.25 billion), supports Artemis lunar missions (\$7.78 billion), preserves aeronautics research (\$935 million) and protects NASA's science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education programs. While lawmakers agreed to cancel the over-budget Mars Sample Return mission, they provided \$110 million to preserve related technology development. The House is expected to vote on the package ahead of the January 30

government funding deadline.

### Takeaways From Congress' Latest Spending Package (E&E Daily)

Congressional appropriators unveiled a bipartisan three-bill minibus that includes FY26 funding for energy, environment and science agencies, rejecting many of the deep cuts proposed by the Trump administration. NASA would receive \$24.4 billion, maintaining support for the Artemis program and STEM education. The National Science Foundation would be level-funded at \$8.8 billion, avoiding significant reductions previously floated by House Republicans. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) would receive \$6.2 billion, with additional funding for weather service staffing and climate satellites. Overall, the Commerce-Justice-Science bill preserves core research and satellite programs despite broader nondefense spending cuts. The legislation will still have to clear some hurdles however, with Colorado Senators already placing holds on the package over the administration's move to dismantle the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

### Rep. Sykes Reintroduces Bipartisan AIRSHIP Act to Advance Safe, Sustainable Airship

Research (Office of Rep. Emilia Sykes)

On January 6, 2026, Reps. Emilia Sykes (D-OH) and Dave Joyce (R-OH) reintroduced the bipartisan Airship Improvement Research for Safety and Humanitarian Innovation Projects (AIRSHIP) Act. The bill authorizes NASA to lead research and development on modern airships to support sustainable air cargo, disaster response, and humanitarian aid delivery. It enables NASA to launch initiatives addressing safety, environmental impact and noise, and to award grants to university, industry and government teams for airship innovation.

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## Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-OH) introduced the AIRSHIP Act ([H.R. 6898](#)) which amends title 51, United States Code, to promote advancements and innovation in United States aeronautical research and technology for enhanced safety, noise, resiliency and improved environmental impacts in United States aviation systems.

Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) introduced the Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment Appropriations Act, 2026 ([H.R. 6938](#)) which provides FY26 appropriations to several federal departments and agencies for activities and programs related to commerce, law enforcement, science, energy and water development, public lands and the environment.

Please find our Space Legislation Tracker [here](#).

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## Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(January 5, 2026 - January 18, 2026)

On January 6, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) held a closed briefing on intelligence matters.

On January 6, the Senate Committee on Armed Services (SASC) received a closed briefing on Department of Defense cyber operations and readiness for the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year 2025.

On January 7, SSCI held a closed briefing on intelligence matters.

On January 8, the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology (SST) held a hearing titled “Chemistry Competitiveness: Fueling Innovation and Streamlining Processes to Ensure Safety and Security.”

On January 13, the House SST Subcommittee on Environment will hold a hearing titled “From Orbit to Operations: How Weather Satellites Support the National Security Mission.”

On January 14, the House SST Subcommittee on Research and Technology will hold a hearing titled “Assessing America’s AI Action Plan.”

## In the White House/Executive Branch

### Articles and Quotes

#### [2026 Outlook: Can Acquisition Reform Deliver for Military Space? \(SpaceNews\)](#)

The Pentagon begins 2026 under pressure to deliver on acquisition reform in military space, focusing on commercial integration, missile defense and long-term adoption of new capabilities. The Department of the Air Force is shifting toward portfolio-based management to streamline procurement and better align programs like missile warning, space domain awareness and communications. This reorganization aims to empower acquisition leaders, reduce duplication and accelerate fielding. Industry observers are watching whether decision-making authority is truly decentralized and whether commercial systems are integrated without burdensome customization. Congressional leaders have pushed for greater commercial adoption, but budget instability and the uncertain status of programs like the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) create hurdles. The Golden Dome missile defense initiative is a prominent 2026 test case for reform, with a 2028 operational goal and a focus on prototypes and industry engagement this year. Separately, the Space Force will conduct key on-orbit servicing and refueling demonstrations to determine the future of space logistics. Despite progress, the year is viewed as a critical test of whether the Pentagon’s acquisition reforms can move beyond process changes and deliver meaningful outcomes.

## Trump Threatens Defense Contractors with Restrictions While Promising Sharp Increase in Spending (CNN)

President Donald Trump issued a stark threat to defense contracting companies on January 7, saying he would seek to limit stock buybacks and executive salaries unless they improve their delivery of weapons systems to the U.S. military, hours before saying he's decided to substantially increase the defense budget. The pair of social media posts suggest that the Trump administration is aiming to squeeze large defense contractors, or primes in industry parlance, while increasing defense spending to upwards of \$1.5 trillion. [Wednesday evening, the administration published an executive order formalizing the President's comments on social media.]

Read Akin's client alert about the executive order [here](#).

## NASA Begins Infrastructure Overhaul Under Isaacman as Trump Pushes Ambitious Space Exploration Goals (Fox News)

Newly confirmed NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman has launched an infrastructure overhaul starting with the demolition of two historic testing facilities at Marshall Space Flight Center, part of a broader modernization effort enabled by funding from the One Big Beautiful Bill Act. The move aligns with President Trump's new executive order on space superiority, which outlines goals such as a Mars landing, returning astronauts to the Moon by 2028, deploying lunar nuclear reactors by 2030 and replacing the International Space Station (ISS) with commercial stations. Isaacman's first steps reflect a pivot toward next-generation exploration capabilities and streamlined launch infrastructure.

## Space Warfare in 2026: A Pivotal Year for US Readiness (Defense News)

The U.S. Space Force enters 2026 focused on achieving space superiority amid rising threats from China and Russia, as outlined in the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission's 2025 report and emphasized by Gen. B. Chance Saltzman's strategic guidance. The service is transitioning from a supportive role to a full-spectrum warfighting force, advancing its "Race to Resilience" initiative with critical upgrades like proliferated low-Earth orbit sensors, anti-jam communications and missile tracking systems. Key developments include the Golden Dome missile defense program, virtual warfighting simulations, on-orbit servicing demonstrations and the expansion of the Commercial Augmentation Space Reserve. These efforts, backed by nearly \$40 billion in FY26 funding, aim to ensure the resilience and superiority of U.S. space capabilities in contested environments.

## White House Signals Escalated Fraud Enforcement (Akin)

Vice President JD Vance outlined a new nationwide fraud enforcement initiative on January 8 anchored by a new Senate-confirmed Department of Justice (DOJ) leadership position that will be "run out of the White House" and report directly to President Trump and the Vice President. The new Assistant Attorney General (AAG) for DOJ's "Division for National Fraud Enforcement" will be announced "in the next few days," with Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-S.D.) promising a "swift confirmation." A companion White House fact sheet describes a "new division" within the DOJ focused broadly on national fraud enforcement. Per the fact sheet, the division will enforce both criminal and civil laws against "fraud targeting Federal government programs, Federally

funded benefits, businesses, nonprofits, and private citizens nationwide.”

## Federal Agency Space News

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

[Space Station Research Informs New FDA-Approved Cancer Therapy](#) (January 6, 2026)

[NASA, SpaceX CRS-33 Dragon Boost Space Station](#) (December 29, 2025)

[NASA Works MAVEN Spacecraft Issue Ahead of Solar Conjunction](#) (December 23, 2025)

U.S. Air Force

[Human-Machine Teaming In Battle Management: A Collaborative Effort Across Borders](#) (January 5, 2026)

U.S. Department of Defense

[Department of War Establishes New Acquisition Model to More than Triple PAC-3 MSE Production](#) (January 6, 2026)

[Hegseth Launches Multistate Tour in Support of Defense Industrial Base](#) (January 6, 2026)

[Marine Corps Launches New Drone Training Program](#) (December 31, 2025)

U.S. Space Force

[Space Flag 26-1 Expands, Advances Electromagnetic Warfare Tactics](#) (January 7, 2026)

## International

### Articles & Quotes

[European Space Agency Confirms Server Breach](#) (*Infosecurity Magazine*)

The European Space Agency (ESA) confirmed that a recent cyber incident compromised a small number of external servers used for unclassified collaborative engineering activities. While the agency emphasized that its core corporate network was unaffected, a hacker claimed responsibility for stealing over 200 gigabytes (GB) of data, including source code, credentials and confidential documents. ESA stated that it is conducting a forensic analysis, has notified relevant stakeholders, and has secured potentially affected devices. The breach highlights vulnerabilities

in space-sector cybersecurity, especially amid growing reliance on distributed partnerships and commercial technologies. European regulators, including the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), have warned of the potential cascading effects of satellite-related attacks.

### China's Space Station Carries Out 31 New Science and Application Projects in 2025: Media Report (Global Times)

China conducted 31 new space science and application projects aboard its Tiangong space station in 2025, delivering nearly 868 kilograms (kg) of experimental materials and returning over 83 kg of samples to Earth. These efforts produced 150 terabytes of scientific data and over 50 patents. Highlights included the first mouse space experiment in orbit and pioneering biological research under combined sub-magnetic and microgravity conditions, yielding insights for deep-space life support. China also advanced battery science by studying lithium-ion behavior in microgravity and plans to launch two flagship astronomy missions, a survey telescope and a high-energy cosmic radiation detector, in the near future.

### After Half a Decade, the Russian Space Station Segment Stopped Leaking (Ars Technica)

A persistent air leak aboard the International Space Station's Russian segment appears to have stopped after years of concern. The leak originated from microscopic cracks in the PrK module, located between a Progress spacecraft and the Zvezda service module, and had worsened in 2024, prompting NASA to label it a high-risk issue. Roscosmos cosmonauts used a process of isolation and sealant application over several years to locate and fix the cracks. NASA has now confirmed that pressure in the affected area is "holding steady," though monitoring will continue. Meanwhile, Russia is also working to repair its main human spaceflight launch pad at Baikonur, which was damaged during a Soyuz launch in November. NASA expects Progress and Soyuz missions to resume on schedule beginning in March 2026.

*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)**

### In Space Manufacturing-Advanced Space Technologies for Resilient Operations (ISM-ASTRO)

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: January 16, 2026

### Mounted Assured Positioning, Navigation, and Timing System (MAPS) GEN II Production and Sustainment IDIQ

Department of Defense

Close Date: January 19, 2026

### NASA Headquarters Earth Independent Operations (EIO) Partnerships in Anomaly

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: January 26, 2026

## Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Detection and Analysis Services

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: February 9, 2026

## Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

### Enhanced Use Lease for Commercial Data Centers

Department of Defense

Close Date: January 15, 2026

### Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Systems and Information Operations (IO) from Seabed to Space (S2ISR)

Department of Defense

Close Date: January 31, 2026

## Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed rules.

## Upcoming Space Events

### SciTech Forum

AIAA

January 12-16, 2026

### Small Bodies Assessment Group (SBAG)

NASA

January 13-14, 2026

### Post-CM25 Industry Event

ESA

January 14, 2026

### American Meteorological Society (AMS) Annual Meeting

AMS

January 25-29, 2026

### Middle East Space Conference

Novaspace

January 26-28, 2026

Lunar Surface Science Workshop (LSSW)

NASA SSERVI

January 27-28, 2026

Commercial Space Week

Spacecom

January 27-30, 2026

Space Congress 2026

Spacecom

January 28-30, 2026

Interagency Astronomy and Astrophysics Advisory Committee (AAAC)

NSF-NASA-DOE

January 29-30, 2026

2026 SmallSat Symposium

SmallSat

February 10-12, 2026

Defense and Intelligence Space Conference

NSSA

February 9-11, 2026

2026 Space Traffic Conference

IAA

February 18-19, 2026

Warfare Symposium

AFA

February 23-25, 2026

Beyond Earth Symposium

Beyond Earth Institute

February 24-25, 2026

ASCENDxTEXAS

AIAA

February 25-26, 2026

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## Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

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