Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

Policy developments over the past two weeks underscore a central theme of today's space economy: the need to scale. Projections that U.S. launch demand could quadruple in the next decade, plans to develop a third national launch site to accommodate that expanded launch tempo, and a massive internal restructuring at NASA are just a few recent U.S. developments pointing to the industry's rapid growth. At the same time the EU, as well as several member states, are focused on investing in and growing indigenous space capabilities to reduce Europe's exposure to changes in U.S. space policy.

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

On The Hill

Articles and Quotes

Space Force Study Recommends Third Heavy Launch Site (*Air & Space Forces Magazine*)
Air Force Secretary Troy Meink told the House Armed Services Committee on May 20 that a recent Space Force infrastructure study found the service will likely require a third launch site capable of supporting heavy and super heavy launches to address growing government and commercial demand. The study, mandated by Congress in the fiscal year (FY) 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), concluded that existing launch infrastructure at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station and Vandenberg Space Force Station faces both capacity and resiliency limitations. Together, the two spaceports supported 175 launches in 2025 and are projected to support as many as 700 missions annually by 2036 as commercial providers and the Pentagon expand large satellite constellations and proliferated architectures. Congress previously allocated $1.3 billion through FY 2028 for launch infrastructure improvements, while the Space Force's FY 2027 budget request seeks an additional $2.2 billion for related investments. Chief of Space Operations Gen. Chance Saltzman told lawmakers the service is also evaluating partnerships with state-run spaceports and considering shifting smaller launch missions to alternative ranges as part of a broader effort to expand launch capacity and geographic resiliency.

Anderson Confirmed As NASA Deputy Administrator (*SpaceNews*)
On May 18, the Senate confirmed Matt Anderson as deputy administrator of the National

Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in a 46-43 vote largely along party lines, filling the agency's second-highest leadership position. Anderson, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, was originally nominated in 2025 and renominated earlier this year following the confirmation of NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman. During his confirmation hearing before the Senate Commerce Committee, Anderson stated that NASA's highest priority is returning astronauts to the moon before China achieves its first crewed lunar landing and supporting plans for a lunar base by 2028. He also pledged to reinforce safety, accountability and transparency across the agency. The Senate Commerce Committee previously advanced his nomination with bipartisan support in a 23-5 vote in March. NASA stated that Anderson will help oversee agency operations and implementation of President Trump's National Space Policy.

House Armed Services Releases NDAA Draft (*Politico*)
On May 26, the House Armed Services Committee released a draft of its version of the FY 2027 NDAA, including the full committee chairman's mark and seven subcommittee portions of the legislation. The release begins the formal congressional consideration process for the annual defense policy bill. The committee is scheduled to hold its full committee markup on June 4, during which lawmakers are expected to consider hundreds of amendments to the measure. House Republican leadership is expected to bring the NDAA to the House floor later in June.

Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

Sen. Brian Schatz (D-HI) **introduced** the Scientific Integrity Act (**S. 4545**), which would amend the America Creating Opportunities for Manufacturing, Pre-Eminence in Technology and Economic Strength (COMPETES) Act (**P.L. 110-69**) to establish certain scientific integrity policies for Federal agencies that fund, conduct or oversee scientific research.

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-AR) **introduced** the Intelligence Authorization Act for FY 2027 (**S. 4615**), which would authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2027 for intelligence and intelligence-related activities of the United States government, the Intelligence Community Management Account and the Central Intelligence Agency Retirement and Disability System. The bill **passed** the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence by a vote of 14-3 and was placed on the Senate Legislative Calendar.

Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI) introduced the Expanding Whistleblower Protections for Contractors Act of 2026 (**S. 4631**), which would ensure that whistleblowers, including contractors, are protected from retaliation when a federal employee orders a reprisal. The bill **passed** the Senate and was received in the House.

Rep. Mike Rogers (R-AL) introduced the NDAA for FY 2027 (**H.R. 8800**), which would authorize appropriations for FY 2027 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction and for defense activities of the Department of Energy to prescribe military personnel strengths for such FY.

Rep. Hal Rogers (R-KY) introduced the Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2027 (**H.R. 8845**), which would make appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science and Related Agencies for the FY ending September 30, 2027. The bill was reported by the House Appropriations Committee (**H. Rept. 119-652**) and **placed** on the Union Calendar, No. 567.

Rep. Mike Haridopolos (R-FL) introduced a bill to amend title 51, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Transportation to establish an electronic processing portal for licenses and other approvals related to commercial space launch activities, and for other purposes (**H.R. 8851**).

Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT) **introduced** the Job Corps and Skilled Defense Workforce Act (**H.R. 8925**), which would require the Secretary of Defense to align the Job Corps program with the defense industrial base. Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI) **introduced** a companion bill (**S. 4611**) in the Senate.

Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL) **introduced** the Semiconductor Superiority Act (**H.R. 8959**), which would amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to clarify the application of the advanced manufacturing investment credit with respect to semiconductor manufacturing facilities located in outer space.

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

Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(May 19, 2026 - June 5, 2026)

On May 19, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) held a **hearing** on U.S. Military Posture and National Security Challenges in the Greater Middle East and Africa.

On May 19, the Senate Committee on Armed Services (SASC) held open and closed **hearings** to examine the posture of the Department of the Navy in review of the Defense Authorization Request for FY 2027 and the Future Years Defense Program.

On May 19, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense (SAC-D) held a **hearing** to review the President's FY 2027 Budget Request for the Army.

On May 19, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Subcommittee held a **hearing** to review the President's FY 2027 Budget Request for the Department of Transportation.

On May 19, the SASC Emerging Threats and Capabilities Subcommittee held a **hearing** to examine the science and technology priorities in review of the Defense Authorization Request for FY 2027 and the Future Years Defense Program.

On May 19, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On May 20, HASC held a **hearing** on the Air Force FY 2027 Budget Request.

On May 20, the HASC Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee held a **hearing** on the Navy FY 2027 Budget Request for Seapower and Projection Forces.

On May 20, the SASC Personnel Subcommittee held a **hearing** to examine the Department of Defense personnel policies and programs in review of the Defense Authorization Request for FY 2027 and the Future Years Defense Program.

On May 20, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On May 21, SASC held open and closed **hearings** to receive testimony on the posture of the Department of the Air Force in review of the Defense Authorization Request for FY 2027 and the Future Years Defense Program.

On May 21, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Departments of Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies held a **markup** of the FY 2027 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Bill.

On May 21, House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Departments of Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies held a budget **hearing** on the Department of Transportation.

On May 21, SAC-D held a **hearing** to review the President's FY 2027 Budget Request for the Navy.

On June 3, the House Appropriations Committee will hold a **markup** of the FY 2027 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies bill.

On June 3, the House Small Business Committee will hold a **hearing** on the role of small businesses in U.S. national security.

On June 4, the House Energy & Commerce Committee's Communications and Technology Subcommittee will hold a **hearing** on positioning, navigation, and timing capabilities in the United States.

In the White House/Executive Branch

Articles and Quotes

NASA Unveils Sweeping Reorganization *(Space News)*
NASA announced a sweeping agency-wide reorganization on May 22 that will consolidate major mission directorates, restructure leadership roles and realign personnel across headquarters and field centers as part of an effort to improve efficiency and reduce bureaucracy. NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman said the changes are intended to focus agency resources on core missions without conducting layoffs or closing centers. The agency will merge the Exploration Systems Development Mission Directorate and the Space Operations Mission Directorate into a new Human Spaceflight Mission Directorate overseeing Artemis, International Space Station operations, Commercial Low-Earth Orbit Destinations and the Moon Base initiative. NASA will also combine the Space Technology Mission Directorate and Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate into a new Research and Technology Mission Directorate responsible for aeronautics, advanced research, space communications and nuclear space programs, including a new Space Reactor Office. The restructuring includes several leadership changes across NASA centers and headquarters, plans to compete the Jet Propulsion Laboratory management contract for the first time, and the creation of a new position to oversee future NASA Headquarters relocation planning within the Washington, D.C., area ahead of the expiration of the agency's current lease in 2028.

NASA Lays Out Moon Base Plans With Landers, Buggies and Drones at the Top of the List *(NPR)*
On May 26, NASA outlined the first phase of its planned lunar base infrastructure, awarding contracts to several U.S. companies to support future Artemis missions near the Moon's south pole. Blue Origin will provide lunar landers designed to transport lunar terrain vehicles developed by Astrolab and Lunar Outpost, while Firefly Aerospace will deliver drones intended for surface operations and perimeter monitoring. NASA expects much of this hardware to arrive before astronauts return to the lunar surface, currently targeted for 2028 following the planned Artemis III mission. Agency officials said the Moon base initiative will support scientific research, enable development of a lunar economy, and help prepare for future Mars missions, with later phases expected to include permanent infrastructure such as power systems and long-duration habitats throughout the 2030s.

Space Force Space Force Accelerating Work to Operationalize On-Orbit Logistics Tech *(Defense Scoop)*
The Space Force is accelerating efforts to operationalize on-orbit logistics technologies through a series of demonstrations and industry partnerships aimed at advancing in-space refueling, satellite servicing and orbital maneuver capabilities. Space Systems Command plans to conduct two demonstrations in 2027, including an in-space refueling effort involving Astroscale, Orbit Fab, and the Air Force Research Laboratory's Tetra 5 satellite, as well as an augmented maneuver demonstration with Starfish Space's Otter vehicle designed to reposition satellites in orbit. Officials said the demonstrations are intended to inform the development of a future space-based logistics enterprise while also supporting near-term operational needs such as extending satellite lifespan and improving maneuverability. The Space Force is additionally working with SpaceWERX on a $20 million In-Domain Orbital Logistics Challenge focused on technologies including orbital warehousing, transfer vehicles, propellant management and satellite repair and refueling. Officials indicated future budget requests may include increased

investment in servicing, mobility and logistics capabilities as the service refines long-term plans for an operational in-space logistics architecture.

US Air Force Looks To Convert Offshore Oil Rigs Into Rocket Recovery Platforms *(Defense News)*
The U.S. Air Force is exploring a proposal known as Project Able Baker to convert decommissioned offshore oil rigs into sea-based recovery platforms for reusable rocket boosters launched by the Space Force and commercial providers. Through a Small Business Innovation Research solicitation, the Air Force said the concept could support higher launch cadences, reduce reliance on specialized recovery ships and repurpose aging maritime infrastructure while limiting environmental disruption associated with removing retired oil platforms. The proposed Sea-Based Recovery Stations would be designed to support heavy-lift rockets such as SpaceX's Falcon 9, ULA's Vulcan and Blue Origin's New Glenn by incorporating reinforced structures, flame deflection systems, fire suppression capabilities and autonomous landing guidance technologies. Initial phases of the effort will focus on technical and economic feasibility studies, environmental assessments and identifying suitable offshore platforms, while later phases could involve structural testing using simulated rocket landing conditions. The Air Force said the concept could also support tactically responsive space operations and provide additional recovery capacity as launch activity continues to increase.

Federal Agency Space News

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NASA Provides Update on Moon Base Rovers, Landers, Missions (May 26, 2026)

NASA to Announce Artemis III Crew, Provide Mission Progress Update (May 26, 2026)

NASA Announces Realignment to Accelerate Mission Delivery (May 22, 2026)

NASA Joins Artemis Accords Workshop as Global Signings Rise (May 21, 2026)

NASA Seeks Interest for Artemis Mission CubeSats (May 21, 2026)

NASA Highlights 2025 International Space Station Science Results (May 21, 2026)

NASA Releases Technology Priorities to Energize Space Industry (May 20, 2026)

EU Space Act Update (May 12, 2026)

U.S Department of Defense

Department of War Announces Second Round of Appointments to the Newly Established Science, Technology and Innovation Board (May 27, 2026)

Department of War Publishes Second Release of Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena Files (May 22, 2026)

Robotic Servicing of Geosynchronous Satellites Technology to Launch in 2026 (May 20, 2026)

U.S. Space Force

DAF Leaders Outline Readiness, Modernization Priorities in FY27 Budget Testimony (May 21, 2026)

ICBM Test Launch Verifies System Reliability (May 20, 2026)

International

Articles & Quotes

Isaacman: Chinese Taikonauts Likely to Fly Around Moon in 2027 *(Space Policy Online)*
NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman said at the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics ASCEND conference on May 19 that Chinese taikonauts will "likely" fly around the Moon in 2027, ending the United States' status as the only country to send humans into the lunar environment. Isaacman framed the U.S.-China competition in space as a modern-day space race and argued the United States must accelerate its lunar exploration efforts to maintain leadership. He pointed to the recent Artemis II mission as the "opening act" in America's return to the Moon and reiterated NASA's plans to conduct the Artemis III mission in 2027 to test rendezvous and docking procedures between the Orion spacecraft and commercial Human Landing Systems developed by SpaceX and Blue Origin. Isaacman also said NASA is working to increase the launch cadence of the Space Launch System (SLS) and is targeting a partial Wet Dress Rehearsal (WDR) for the lunar lander systems by the end of the year. China has publicly stated its goal of landing taikonauts on the Moon by 2030, though details regarding potential precursor crewed lunar missions have not yet been disclosed.

ESA Chief Calls on Europe to Double Funds for Space *(Payload Space)*
European Space Agency Director General Josef Aschbacher called on European nations to at least double, and potentially triple, public investment in space capabilities in order to strengthen Europe's technological sovereignty and reduce dependence on the United States. Speaking at the GLOBSEC forum and in a related op-ed, Aschbacher argued that recent NASA program changes, including the pause of the Gateway program and cancellation of Mars Sample Return, exposed Europe's vulnerability to decisions made outside the continent. He urged European governments to use the upcoming 2028–2034 European Union (EU) Multiannual Financial Framework to establish a long-term strategy for autonomous space exploration and infrastructure development. Aschbacher emphasized that increased funding alone would not be sufficient without coordinated political support and warned against fragmented national approaches as countries including Germany, France and Luxembourg increase independent investments in national space and defense initiatives. He said Europe must act quickly to establish sovereign space capabilities or

risk remaining dependent on U.S. leadership in space exploration and technology.

Germany Touts Pan-German Space Command Amid European Push To Supplant US Tech *(Defense News)*
German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius promoted plans for a European military space command and multinational space training academy during a meeting in Berlin with defense officials from Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg. The discussions were part of Germany's broader €35 billion military space initiative, which includes investments in low Earth orbit satellite constellations, military launch capabilities and expanded space operations within the Bundeswehr. Pistorius stated that partner nations would participate in the design phase of the proposed European Space Component Command and Weltraumakademie, a multilateral space training academy, rather than joining preexisting structures. Austrian Defense Minister Claudia Tanner announced that Austria plans to launch three military-designated satellites and one test object next year through programs involving imaging, navigation, and communications capabilities developed with Austrian startups and international partners. Luxembourg Defense Minister Yuriko Backes highlighted Luxembourg's satellite communications and Earth observation capabilities, while Swiss Federal Councilor Martin Pfister emphasized Europe's dependence on non-European space technologies and called for greater regional cooperation. The meeting reflected broader European efforts to expand independent defense and space capabilities amid growing concerns about reliance on U.S. technology and infrastructure.

European Space Industry Warns EU Space Act Could Slow Competitiveness *(Space News)*
European space industry representatives and legal experts warned that the proposed EU Space Act could slow competitiveness by increasing bureaucracy, extending licensing timelines and creating additional compliance burdens for commercial operators. Speaking at SmallSat Europe, executives and legal specialists said the legislation's current draft could disproportionately affect startups and emerging companies by applying regulatory frameworks originally designed for large established firms such as ArianeGroup and Thales Alenia Space. Panelists also raised concerns that the Act leaves major competitiveness issues, including licensing timelines, liability, insurance and administrative processes, under national control, potentially creating uneven market access across Europe. Participants further warned that non-EU European countries such as Norway and United Kingdom could be treated similarly to external competitors under the framework, potentially complicating cooperation involving launch providers and facilities like Andøya Spaceport. Industry representatives said the proposal risks slowing commercial growth and straining long-term transatlantic space relationships if market access for U.S. operators becomes more restrictive.

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)

Environmental Satellite Ground Station

Department of Defense
Close Date: June 1, 2026

Enabling Exploration Through Partnerships in Advanced Computing
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: June 1, 2026

Spaceflight Guidance, Navigation, and Control (GNC)
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: June 5, 2026

Combatant Commanders Integrated Command and Control System (CCIC2S) Service Life Extension Program (SLEP)
Department of Defense
Close Date: July 20, 2026

Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory (NBL) Facility Commercial Utilization
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: September 30, 2026

Private Sector Participation in Domestic and International Events on Spaceflight Safety, Responsible Practices, and Commercial Space
Department of State
Close Date: December 31, 2026

Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

Near Earth Orbit Network Program's Sounder for Microwave-Based Applications
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: June 1, 2026

Commercial SmallSat Data Acquisition (CSDA) Program Indefinite Delivery Indefinite Quantity (IDIQ) On-Ramp 2
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: September 5, 2026

Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed rules.

Upcoming Space Events

Interagency Astronomy & Astrophysics Advisory Committee (AAAC)

NSF-NASA-DOE
June 1, 2026

2nd Latin American Conference on Space & Society
IAA
June 1-6, 2026

2026 Global Space Conference on Climate Change
IAF
June 2-4, 2026

SSB/ASEB/BPA Joint Meeting
National Academies
June 2-5, 2026

Space Tech Expo USA 2026
Space Tech Expo
June 3-4, 2026

Space Capacity Allocation for the Sustainability of Space Activities workshop
Secure World Foundation
June 3-5, 2026

44th International Space Development Conference
The National Space Society
June 4-7, 2026

MILSATCOM USA 2026
SAE Media Group
June 8-10, 2026

35th Meeting of the NASA Small Bodies Assessment Group
SBAG
June 9-11, 2026

Space Threats & Acquisition Forum
NSSA
June 10-11, 2026

U.N. Committee on Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
COPUOS
June 10-19, 2026

9th Prague Space Security Conference
Prague Security Studies Institute
June 14-16, 2026

European Lunar Symposium 2026

European Lunar Symposium
June 22-26, 2026

Space Renaissance International IV World Congress
Space Renaissance International
June 30-July 4, 2026

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Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

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