Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

There has been a lot of orbital maneuvering in Washington over the past two weeks as the House Science Committee leadership rebuffed a proposed FCC rulemaking focused on space safety and admonished the commission not to drift beyond its spectrum mandate, a Senate bill sought to extend the International Space Station's life an additional two years and NASA announced it was reshuffling its lunar priorities yet again.

Around the world, China's expanding space footprint in Latin America is raising alarm bells in the U.S.; Europe and Beijing use lasers to achieve gigabit links to GEO and the U.S. complained about EU plans intended to protect the European space industrial base.

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

On The Hill

Articles and Quotes

House Science Committee Leaders Criticize FCC Rulemaking on Space Safety (*SpaceNews*)
Leaders of the House Science Committee criticized a rulemaking effort by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), arguing that portions of the agency's "**Space Modernization for the 21st Century**" notice of proposed rulemaking exceed the FCC's statutory authority. In a letter to FCC Chairman Brendan Carr, Committee Chair Brian Babin (R-TX) and Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) said they support efforts to streamline satellite and ground station licensing but raised concerns about provisions related to space safety that they argue fall outside the FCC's mandate to regulate spectrum and prevent radiofrequency interference. The lawmakers warned that conditioning spectrum licenses on broader operational requirements could exceed the commission's authority under the Communications Act of 1934, particularly following the Supreme Court's 2024 ruling in *Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo*, which limited agency regulatory authority absent clear congressional authorization. The debate reflects ongoing congressional discussions about establishing a broader "mission authorization" framework for commercial space activities and clarifying which federal agencies are responsible for orbital safety and debris mitigation oversight.

China Expands Space Footprint in Latin America, Raising Military Alarms in America's Backyard (*Fox News*)
A new report from the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party warns that China is expanding a network of space-related facilities across Latin America that could have dual-use military applications. The analysis identifies at least 11 China-linked installations, including ground stations, radio telescopes and satellite tracking sites in Argentina, Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile and Brazil, which lawmakers say could support China's military-civil fusion strategy integrating civilian and commercial space infrastructure with capabilities used by the People's Liberation Army. The report highlights particular concern over a Chinese-operated deep-space tracking station in Argentina's Neuquén province, noting that although Beijing describes the facility as supporting civilian space exploration, its capabilities could enhance China's space domain awareness and intelligence collection in the Western Hemisphere. Lawmakers called for greater scrutiny of Chinese space infrastructure in the region and urged the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to review partnerships with countries hosting such facilities to ensure compliance with existing restrictions on U.S.–China space cooperation.

Commerce Committee Passes Landmark NASA Authorization Act (Senate CST)
On March 4, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee unanimously advanced the **NASA Authorization Act of 2026**, a bipartisan measure led by Chair Ted Cruz (R-TX) and Ranking Member Maria Cantwell (D-WA) that authorizes $24.7 billion for NASA in FY2026 and $25.3 billion in FY2027. The legislation establishes a framework for a sustained U.S. presence in space, including authorizing the creation of a permanent lunar base capable of long-duration habitation and supporting NASA's Artemis program goal of returning astronauts to the Moon in 2028. It also extends operations of the International Space Station through 2032 while directing NASA to transition to commercially operated space stations, requires evaluation of new crew rescue capabilities for orbital and lunar missions, and reaffirms support for major science programs and telescopes. Lawmakers said the measure is intended to sustain U.S. leadership in space exploration while strengthening commercial participation in low-Earth-orbit activities and maintaining NASA's broader aeronautics and technology development programs.

Chairman Babin Backs AIAA Bid to Host International Astronautical Congress in the United States (House SST)
On March 2, House Science, Space and Technology Committee Chairman Brian Babin sent a **letter** expressing support for the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics' (AIAA) bid to host a future International Astronautical Congress (IAC) in the United States. In the letter, Chairman Babin underscored the importance of international cooperation in space, writing, "As space activities expand in scope, complexity, and geopolitical importance, the role of the IAC as a neutral, international convening platform has never been more critical."

Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

On March 4, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation held a **markup** of the Weather Research and Forecasting Innovation Reauthorization Act of 2026 (**S. 3923**) and the

NASA Transition Authorization Act of 2025 (**S. 933**). Both bills **passed**, as amended, by a voice vote.

Rep. Warren Davidson (R-OH) **introduced** the Defense Production Act (DPA) Modernization Act of 2026 (**H.R. 7688**) which aims to modernize and reauthorize the DPA of 1950.

Sen. Tim Sheehy (R-MT) **introduced** a bill to authorize the transfer by the Secretary of the Navy to the U.S. Space and Rocket Center Commission in Huntsville, Alabama, of certain F-14 Tomcat aircraft (**H.R. 3899**).

On February 23, the Accessing Satellite Capabilities to Enable New Discoveries (ASCEND) Act (**H.R. 2600**), which aims to codify NASA's Commercial SmallSat Data Acquisition (CSDA) program, **passed** the House by voice vote and was received in the Senate and placed on the legislative calendar.

On February 23, the Advanced Capabilities for Emergency Response Operations (ACERO) Act (**H.R. 390**), which authorizes the utilization of NASA's ACERO program for aerial wildfire response, **passed** the House by voice vote and was received in the Senate.

Rep. Sam Graves (R-MO) **introduced** the All Economic Regulations are Transparent (ALERT) Act (**H.R. 7613**), which requires certain aircraft to be equipped with collision mitigation technology, improves helicopter route safety and separation around airports, updates air traffic control processes and procedures, addresses national airspace system safety in Department of Defense activities.

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

Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(February 23, 2026 - March 13, 2026)

On February 24, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) held a **hearing** titled "Modernization of the Organic Industrial Base."

On February 25, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On February 26, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) held a **hearing** to consider nominations.

On March 3, SASC held an open **hearing** to receive an update on the National Defense Strategy, immediately followed by a closed session.

On March 4, HASC held a **hearing** titled "Speed to Scale: Revitalizing the Defense Industrial

Base."

On March 4, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation (CST) held an **executive session** to consider S. 933, to authorize programs for NASA for fiscal year 2025, S. 3923, to improve the weather research of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, support improvements in weather forecasting and prediction and expand commercial opportunities for the provision of weather data, and certain coast guard promotions.

On March 4, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) held a closed **briefing**.

On March 4, the SASC Readiness and Management Support Subcommittee held a **hearing** to examine the current readiness of the Joint Force.

On March 4, the HASC Readiness Subcommittee held a **hearing** to receive updates on energy, installations, and environment programs.

On March 4, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On March 5, SASC held a **hearing** to examine the American small drone industrial base.

On March 5, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Departments of Transportation (DOT), and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and Related Agencies held a **hearing** to receive testimony from Inspectors General for DOT and HUD.

On March 5, HASC held a posture **hearing** on U.S. defense strategy.

On March 5, Senate CST held a **hearing** to consider nominations for NASA and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

In the White House/Executive Branch

Articles and Quotes

NASA Shakes Up Moon Plans (*Politico*)
NASA announced plans to restructure its Artemis program by adding an additional test mission ahead of a lunar landing in an effort to accelerate timelines for returning U.S. astronauts to the Moon. Under the revised approach outlined by NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman, the Artemis III mission, previously intended to conduct the next crewed lunar landing, would instead launch in mid-2027 and perform operations in low Earth orbit, including rendezvous tests between the Orion spacecraft and lunar landers under development. NASA would then attempt two lunar landings in 2028, as the agency works toward a goal of placing U.S. astronauts on the lunar surface before China's planned landing later in the decade. The restructuring also includes

canceling a planned upgrade to the Space Launch System rocket in favor of standardizing the vehicle to support more frequent missions, reflecting broader efforts to streamline Artemis and address longstanding delays in the program.

Space Force Officials Preparing for More Budget Growth in 2027 (*Air & Space Forces Magazine*)
Leaders of the U.S. Space Force said the service expects continued budget growth in fiscal year 2027 as demand for space capabilities expands across the joint force. Chief of Space Operations Chance Saltzman said growing recognition of threats in the space domain has strengthened support among defense stakeholders for increased resources, following a nearly $14 billion boost that raised the service's fiscal 2026 budget to roughly $40 billion. Officials indicated additional funding would support priorities such as space domain awareness, missile warning and tracking, testing and training infrastructure, and new operational systems. Air Force Secretary Troy Meink said demand for space capabilities continues to rise across the Department of Defense (DoD), while other leaders highlighted the need for greater production capacity and workforce growth to manage expanding programs. The expected funding increases come as the service also seeks to expand personnel and acquisition capacity to support new missions and manage an increasingly complex national security space architecture.

Isaacman's "NASA Force" Envisions Term-Limited Industry Positions in NASA (*Space Policy Online*)
NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman announced a workforce initiative called "NASA Force," aimed at recruiting technical professionals from private industry to serve in short-term roles at NASA as part of efforts to rebuild the agency's technical capacity and accelerate key space programs. Developed in coordination with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the concept would bring engineers and specialists from advanced technology companies into the agency for approximately one- to three-year appointments to support mission development and innovation. Officials said the initiative aligns with OPM's broader U.S. Tech Force program designed to embed specialized talent across federal agencies. Isaacman linked the effort to NASA's broader push to accelerate the Artemis program and return U.S. astronauts to the Moon by 2028, emphasizing the need to strengthen the agency's workforce and restore technical expertise needed to support future lunar missions and other space exploration initiatives.

Cyber, Space Commands Were Among 'First Movers' in Strikes on Iran: Top General (*Defense One*)
Early stages of the U.S. military campaign against Iran relied heavily on non-kinetic operations conducted by United States Cyber Command and United States Space Command, which officials said were among the "first movers" in the operation. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Dan Caine said coordinated space and cyber actions disrupted Iranian communications and sensor networks, degrading Tehran's ability to detect, coordinate or respond to the subsequent military strikes. These operations layered "non-kinetic effects" ahead of the broader campaign, part of the U.S. offensive known as Operation Epic Fury, helping to disorient Iranian defenses before large-scale air and missile strikes were launched against military infrastructure and command facilities. Analysts note that the public acknowledgment of these activities reflects a growing willingness by U.S. officials to describe cyber and space capabilities as integrated components of modern combat operations rather than covert or standalone tools.

Space Force Rethinks Satellite Ground Station Strategy (*SpaceNews*)
The U.S. Space Force is revising its strategy for acquiring satellite command-and-control infrastructure, shifting away from customized government-built ground stations toward commercially derived systems. The change affects the Satellite Communications Augmentation Resource (SCAR) program, originally launched to relieve capacity constraints in the military's aging Satellite Control Network that handles tracking, telemetry and command functions for spacecraft. Officials paused work on the existing program and are developing a new acquisition approach that would introduce multiple vendors and rely more heavily on commercially available phased-array antenna technologies rather than bespoke designs. The shift aligns with broader Pentagon efforts to move away from cost-plus development contracts toward fixed-price, commercially-driven procurement models aimed at accelerating delivery, strengthening supply chain resilience and supporting surge production needs as the number of military satellites and operational demands in orbit continue to grow.

Federal Agency Space News

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NASA, OPM Launch NASA Force to Recruit Top Talent for US Space Program (March 4, 2026)

NASA Adds Mission to Artemis Lunar Program, Updates Architecture (February 27, 2026)

NASA Names Acting Leaders for Two Key Human Spaceflight Roles (February 26, 2026)

Teams Begin Artemis II Repairs in Vehicle Assembly Building (February 26, 2026)

NASA's Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel Releases 2025 Annual Report (February 25, 2026)

U.S Department of Defense

USG Seeks Private Sector Advisors for the U.S. Delegation to the 65th Session of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNCOPUOS) Legal Subcommittee (LSC) (March 4, 2026)

U.S. Space Force Strengthens Partnerships at 45th Cobra Gold (March 2, 2026)

Acquisition Reform Means a Focus on Warfighter Success (February 26, 2026)

Senior Air and Space Force Leaders Discuss Defense of Homeland (February 25, 2026)

Joint Interagency Task Force Announces Counter-UAS Marketplace (February 24, 2026)

U.S. Space Force

U.S. Space Force University Consortium Awards New Tech Institutes, Spotlights Major Transition Successes (March 4, 2026)

International

Articles & Quotes

European Space Agency and China Both Achieve Gigabit Links to Geostationary Satellites (*The Register*)
The European Space Agency (ESA) and China's Chinese Academy of Sciences have each demonstrated high-speed laser communications with satellites in geostationary orbit, marking a potential advance in long-distance satellite networking. ESA reported achieving an error-free optical link transmitting data at 2.6 gigabits per second to the Alphasat satellite roughly 36,000 kilometers above Earth, while Chinese researchers said they sustained a symmetrical 1 gigabit-per-second connection with a satellite about 40,000 kilometers away for several hours. The demonstrations highlight progress in laser-based satellite communications capable of overcoming challenges such as atmospheric distortion and precision pointing over extremely long distances. Experts say such technologies could support faster data transfer for scientific missions and commercial networks, while also enabling more advanced command and reprogramming capabilities for satellites operating in high orbit, which may have implications for both civilian and national security space systems.

Top Trump Ally Threatens Retaliation Over EU Space Tech Law (*Politico*)
Chairman Brendan Carr of the FCC warned that the United States could retaliate if the European Union (EU) adopts policies that favor domestic satellite providers over American companies. Carr's comments came in response to the EU's proposed Space Act and broader industrial policies aimed at strengthening European technology sovereignty, which could impose new regulatory requirements on foreign satellite operators and encourage procurement preferences for European firms. Carr argued that U.S. regulators could mirror such restrictions by limiting market access for European satellite companies operating in the United States, emphasizing the need for "reciprocity" in transatlantic space and telecommunications markets. European officials defended the proposed measures as efforts to ensure fair competition and strengthen regional space capabilities, highlighting growing policy tensions between Washington and Brussels as both sides seek to support domestic space industries and reduce dependence on foreign technology providers.

Russia Fixes Launch Pad Damaged by Thanksgiving Astronaut Launch to the International Space Station (*Space Insider*)
Russia has completed repairs to the crew-capable launch pad at Baikonur Cosmodrome that was damaged during a Soyuz rocket launch to the ISS on November 27, 2025. The launch from Site 31, the only Russian pad currently used for crewed ISS missions, caused significant damage to

infrastructure including the service cabin, temporarily grounding launches from the facility. Russia's space agency Roscosmos said more than 150 workers and multiple contractors carried out repairs, replacing electrical systems and structural components, repainting more than 2,300 square meters of infrastructure, and completing hundreds of meters of welds. The pad has now been restored and is being prepared for its next mission, an uncrewed Progress MS-33 resupply launch scheduled for March 22, which will deliver cargo to the ISS. The repair restores Russia's ability to support routine launch operations from Site 31 after the months-long disruption caused by the launch damage.

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)

Production of Payload Transporter Replacement (PTR)
Department of Defense
Close Date: March 12, 2026

GEO Refueling Vehicles for Sustained Space Maneuver
Department of Defense
Close Date: March 13, 2026

Communications, Navigation, Surveillance, and Security (CNS&S) Roadmap
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: March 16, 2026

Commercial Satellite Communications (COMSATCOM) for USSOCOM J6
Department of Defense
Close Date: April 9, 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

SDA Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture (PWSA) - Systems, Technologies, and Emerging Capabilities (STEC) Broad Agency Announcement (BAA)
Department of Defense
Close Date: March 4, 2027

Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

Engineering Services and Science Capability Augmentation (ESSCA) II
National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: March 11, 2026

Solicitation for COMET Defense Intelligence Agency Missile and Space Intelligence Center
Department of Defense
Close Date: April 3, 2026

Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed rules.

Upcoming Space Events

Goddard Space Science Symposium
AAS
March 12-13, 2026

57th Lunar and Planetary Science Conference
LPSC
March 16-20, 2026

2026 Defense Forum
AIAA
March 17-20, 2026

2nd Conference on Earth-Space Sustainability
International Institute of Air and Space Law
March 18-20, 2026

SATShow Week 2026
Satellite x GovMilSpace
March 23-26, 2026

Space Science Week
National Academies
March 23-27, 2026

Science for a New Era of Expl: Path from the Moon to Mars
USRA/SPI
March 27, 2026

4th Annual Spacepower Security Forum
Mitchell Institute
April 1, 2026

5th IAA Conference on Space Situational Awareness
IAA
April 7-9, 2026

41st Space Symposium
Space Foundation
April 13-16, 2026

Earth and Space 2026 Conference
ASCE
April 13-16, 2026

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Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

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