



## Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

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Good Afternoon!

*“You know what makes this bird go up? Funding makes this bird go up.” Dennis Quaid’s line from The Right Stuff has felt less like movie dialogue and more like a policy memo these past two weeks in Washington. OMB paused funding for select NASA missions after Congress brushed aside the administration’s proposed budget cuts; Senate Armed Services Chair Roger Wicker says he has “a million questions” about the Golden Dome budget; NASA’s Starliner Crew Flight Test investigation found that program-viability concerns influenced decision-making; and the U.S., China and others are accelerating efforts to procure commercial space assets for military use.*

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

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### Akin Spotlight

If you’re attending Space Beach Law Lab this week (or will be in the Long Beach area), we hope you’ll join us for cocktails, space talk and fun tomorrow, Tuesday, February 24. Click [here](#) to RSVP.

### On The Hill

#### Articles and Quotes

##### **Senate Committee Advances FCC Satellite Licensing Bill After Changes** (*SpaceNews*)

The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation (CST) Committee advanced an amended version of the Satellite and Telecommunications Streamlining Act (**S. 3639**) on February 12, approving the bill by voice vote after revising provisions related to automatic approval of satellite license applications. The measure would require the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to act on satellite and ground station applications within one year but modifies earlier “deemed granted” language that had raised concerns about automatic approval of large constellations if the agency failed to act. Under the revised bill, the FCC must establish eligibility

criteria for automatic approvals within two years, taking into account factors such as constellation size, orbital configuration, spectrum use and potential interference, and may exclude systems above a specified satellite threshold or those involving federal spectrum. The updated language also provides a 15-business-day window for final agency action once a deemed-granted deadline is triggered. Committee leaders stated the changes were intended to streamline licensing while maintaining safeguards related to interference, defense, weather and aviation systems.

### **GOP Questions Swirl on Golden Dome** *(Punchbowl News)*

Republican lawmakers have signaled growing questions about the Pentagon's "Golden Dome" missile defense initiative as Donald Trump prepares his fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget request, where the layered homeland defense program integrating ground-, air- and space-based systems is expected to feature prominently. The initiative received \$23 billion in one-time funding through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), but members of Congress said they are still awaiting detailed plans from the Department of Defense (DoD or Department of War (DoW)) on how those funds will be allocated. "There are a million questions, a million details," said Roger Wicker (R-MS), Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). "But I think it's a sound concept and I think the American people are supportive of it." Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), a senior appropriator, said, "I can tell you how much we included within the reconciliation bill for Golden Dome, but in terms of what it exactly means, I think the Congress is still waiting to hear on that as well..." Asked where she thinks the project is going, Murkowski responded: "That's what I'd like to know." Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI), SASC Ranking Member, said, "I would hope we could have hearings on it – both classified and unclassified – to lay out the plan and also talk about budgets and where the money's coming from, and how we're going to integrate technology." Rep. Brian Mast (R-FL), Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, predicted the program would generate significant debate among appropriators.

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## **Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates**

Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA) **introduced** the Methane Monitoring Science Act of 2026 (**H.R. 7416**) which mandates that the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Administrator, in consultation with federal agencies, develop a consensus-driven strategy to evaluate ground-based, airborne and space-based methane detection technologies within 18 months of enactment.

Rep. Haley Stevens (D-MI) **introduced** the NASA C-UAS Act (**H.R. 7379**), which amend title 51, United States Code, to provide the NASA authority to detect, identify, monitor and track unmanned aircraft systems.

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation ordered the Satellite and Telecommunications Streamlining Act (**S. 3639**) to be reported with an amendment in the nature of a substitute favorably.

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

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## Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(February 10, 2026 - February 28, 2026)

On February 10, the House Committee on Homeland Security held an oversight [hearing](#).

On February 10, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) held a closed [business meeting and briefing](#) to consider pending intelligence matters.

On February 11, SSCI held a closed [briefing](#) on intelligence matters.

On February 11, the SASC held a [hearing](#) titled “To receive testimony from the Senior Enlisted Leaders on servicemember and family quality of life.”

On February 12, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs held an oversight [hearing](#).

On February 24, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) will hold a [hearing](#) titled “Modernization of the Organic Industrial Base.”

On February 26, SASC will hold a [hearing](#) to consider nominations.

## In the White House/Executive Branch

### Articles and Quotes

#### [White House Withholds NASA Science Funds](#) (*Politico*)

On February 11, The White House’s Office of Management and Budget (OMB) directed a temporary pause on funding for several of NASA’s science missions, despite Congress having restored most of the agency’s science budget in a recently enacted appropriations bill. An internal email to NASA centers indicated the hold applies to a range of science programs, including Earth and climate-related missions as well as planetary research efforts that the administration had previously proposed cutting in its FY2026 budget request. NASA stated that no projects have been canceled and characterized the action as a short-term pause tied to the apportionment process while spend plans are reviewed in coordination with OMB. The temporary hold is expected to last approximately 10 days, though it may be extended pending further

guidance.

### **DoD Eyes Commercial Satellites That Can Spy on Other Satellites** (*Defense News*)

The DoD is seeking commercially developed satellites capable of conducting high-resolution surveillance of other spacecraft in geosynchronous orbit (GEO) under a new Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) solicitation dubbed the Geosynchronous High-Resolution Optical Space-Based Tactical Reconnaissance project, or “Ghost Recon.” The effort aims to address gaps in U.S. ability to maintain custody and closely characterize friendly and adversarial satellites in GEO, including through drive-by inspections and rendezvous and proximity operations. DIU is requesting scalable, lower-cost designs that can be launched within two years, transferred to government ownership within three years and demonstrate regular maneuvering and inspection missions thereafter. Proposed systems must provide detailed space-to-space imagery from standoff distances and support identification, battle damage assessment, and monitoring of resident space objects, including potentially uncooperative targets. The solicitation also notes requirements for GEO endurance, launch compatibility with National Security Space Launch standards and the potential for in-space refueling to extend operational life and maneuverability.

### **Starliner Investigation Identifies Flawed NASA Decision Making** (*SpaceNews*)

NASA has classified the 2024 Crew Flight Test of Boeing’s CST-100 Starliner as a “Type A” mishap, its most serious category, following an independent investigation that cited both technical failures and flawed agency decision-making. The mission experienced multiple thruster failures during approach to the International Space Station (ISS), leading NASA to return the spacecraft uncrewed while astronauts Suni Williams and Butch Wilmore remained aboard the station for more than eight months before returning on a separate vehicle. NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman said the investigation found deficiencies not only in spacecraft design and engineering, but also in leadership oversight and program management, including insufficient follow-through on earlier thruster issues observed during prior uncrewed flights. The report concluded that concerns about program viability influenced decisions, and Isaacman said the mishap designation is intended to ensure full accountability and capture lessons learned. NASA stated it will not proceed with additional crewed or uncrewed Starliner missions until technical root causes are addressed, while reaffirming its commitment to maintaining two commercial crew providers and continuing preparations for future missions, including Artemis 2.

### **NASA Pauses Work on Several Programs Pending Response to White House Executive Order** (*SpaceNews*)

NASA has paused work on several major programs pending its response to a December White House **Executive Order** on national space policy, according to Administrator Jared Isaacman. The order directs NASA to outline plans for advancing U.S. leadership in space exploration, expanding human presence beyond Earth and supporting a National Initiative for American Space Nuclear Power, while also reviewing procurement and acquisition processes. Programs affected include the Fission Surface Power initiative to develop a lunar nuclear reactor, the Commercial Low Earth Orbit Development program supporting future commercial space stations to succeed the International Space Station, lunar rover procurements for Artemis missions and ongoing deliberations over Mars Sample Return. Isaacman said further details on program direction, including potential reforms to Mars Sample Return and nuclear power efforts, would be

communicated in the coming weeks.

### **Space Force Surveys Industry for Refueling Tech** (*Air & Space Forces Magazine*)

The U.S. Space Force issued a February 13 request for information seeking commercially developed satellite refueling capabilities that could be operational by 2030, as it evaluates the military utility and economic viability of on-orbit refueling for national security spacecraft. The notice focuses on servicing vehicles compatible with two previously approved refueling interfaces and requests information on systems that have reached at least a preliminary design review stage, as well as associated ground architecture and planned demonstrations. The timeline aligns with the planned RG-XX space domain awareness constellation, which could become the first operational system designed with refueling capability to augment the Geosynchronous Space Situational Awareness Program. While officials continue to debate whether refuelability should be a formal requirement for future satellites, the service is advancing multiple demonstrations in the coming years to inform decisions on in-space logistics, maneuver enhancement and sustained space operations as part of a broader effort to enable more dynamic mission capabilities.

### **Space Force Needs to Double in Size, Top Enlisted Leader Says** (*Federal News Network*)

The U.S. Space Force should double in size to meet expanding national security demands, Chief Master Sgt. of the Space Force John Bentivegna told the Senate Armed Services Committee on February 11. Bentivegna said that while reaching just over 10,000 uniformed Guardians in 2025 marked a milestone, the current force is insufficient for assigned missions and that doubling end strength is a “national security necessity.” The service has already exceeded its fiscal 2026 recruiting goal by 25% within the first five months of the year and has met or surpassed recruiting targets annually since its establishment in 2019. Senior leaders, including Vice Chief of Space Operations Gen. Shawn Bratton and former Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall, have similarly argued for sustained annual growth, citing the rapid increase in satellites overseen by the service and a budget that has risen to nearly \$40 billion in 2026. Officials said that while recruitment demand remains strong, expanded infrastructure and congressional authorization would be required to support a larger force.

## **Federal Agency Space News**

### **Federal Aviation Administration**

**FAA Steps Up Drone Enforcement in 2025** (February 6, 2026)

### **National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

**Grants Status Requests** (February 18, 2026)

**NASA Advances High-Altitude Traffic Management** (February 17, 2026)

**SpaceX Crew-12 Docks to Station Beginning Long-Duration Mission** (February 14, 2026)

[Following Confidence Test, NASA Continues Artemis II Data Review](#) (February 13, 2026)

[Space Station Research Contributes to Artemis II](#) (February 9, 2026)

U.S. Air Force

[Delivering Deterrence: Sentinel Restructure to Complete in 2026; Initial Capability Timeline Set](#) (February 17, 2026)

U.S. Department of Commerce

[OSC Advances Commercial Space Partnerships at the U.S.-India Space Business Forum and Trade Mission](#) (February 13, 2026)

[Space: The Final Frontier for Standards](#) (February 9, 2026)

[OSC Opens TraCSS “Waitlist” for Satellite Operators](#) (February 4, 2026)

U.S. Department of Defense

[DOW Releases Letter to Defense Industrial Base and Acquisition Stakeholders Seeking Revolutionary FAR Overhaul Phase 2 Input](#) (February 13, 2026)

[DOW Strengthens Domestic Production of Critical Display Technologies](#) (February 12, 2026)

[DOW Finalizes Realignment of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency and the Defense Technology Security Administration](#) (February 10, 2026)

[DOW Addresses Material Obsolescence Through Reverse Engineering Training](#) (February 9, 2026)

[GenAI.mil’s Rapid Expansion Continues With OpenAI Partnership](#) (February 9, 2026)

U.S. Space Force

[U.S. Space Force’s Space Systems Command and United Launch Alliance Successfully ILunch USSF-87 Mission Aboard a Vulcan Rocket](#) (February 12, 2026)

[Space Systems Command, Mission Partners Prepares USSF-87 for National Space Security Launch on ULA’s Vulcan Centaur](#) (February 10, 2026)

**International**

## Articles & Quotes

### [New UN forum Seeks Busting Space Traffic Cooperation Barriers](#) *(Breaking Defense)*

A new United Nations (UN) Expert Group on Space Situational Awareness (EG SSA) convened in Vienna under the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) to develop practical measures for improving international data sharing and coordination amid rising space traffic and collision risks. Initiated last year by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the group aims to enhance operational transparency and harmonize SSA data systems among member states, with participation from government and private sector technical experts. The U.S. delegation, led by NASA and the Department of State, expressed support for advancing tangible information-sharing outcomes to improve spaceflight safety. U.S. officials indicated they hope the talks will encourage greater responsiveness from China, particularly regarding conjunction notifications and collision avoidance coordination involving U.S. and Chinese satellites. The expert group is expected to continue meeting through 2028, when it will present recommendations to the full COPUOS plenary.

### [NASA Administrator Wants To Meet With Head of Roscosmos](#) *(Universe Magazine)*

NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman said he intends to seek a meeting with Roscosmos Director General Dmitry Bakanov and expressed interest in attending the upcoming Soyuz TS-29 launch from Baikonur this summer. Speaking after the Crew-12 mission launch to the ISS, Isaacman said he would like to be present for the Soyuz launch, noting he has a close personal connection to a crew member, likely NASA astronaut Anil Menon. If realized, the visit would mark the first time a NASA administrator has attended a Baikonur launch since 2018. Isaacman indicated that any discussions with Roscosmos would focus on continued cooperation aboard the ISS, where joint operations have persisted despite broader geopolitical tensions. The potential meeting follows earlier contacts between Russian officials and NASA leadership and comes amid ongoing deliberations about the scope and future of U.S.-Russian civil space cooperation.

### [Why China is Being Urged to Integrate Commercial Space Tech With Military Systems](#) *(South China Morning Post)*

Researchers from China's National University of Defense Technology have called for closer integration between commercial space technologies and military systems, urging the development of a "military-civil collaborative" satellite application framework to strengthen the resilience and flexibility of China's space architecture. Writing in a defense industry journal overseen by the State Administration for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence, the authors argued that commercial remote-sensing and synthetic aperture radar satellites can increasingly perform roles similar to military reconnaissance platforms, reflecting a broader global trend in which private-sector space capabilities are being leveraged for defense purposes. The appeal comes amid intensified strategic competition in space, with Chinese analysts citing expanded military use of commercial systems in the United States and rapid growth in China's own commercial launch and satellite sector. The researchers said Beijing should undertake early planning to integrate civilian, commercial and military space capabilities as global space activity accelerates and competition over governance and technological advantage deepens.

### [Global Leaders Meet at Space-Comm Expo in London to Accelerate Future of European Space](#)

## **Industry (SpaceNews)**

Global leaders from government, industry and investment will convene in London on March 4-5 for Space-Comm Expo Europe, a major gathering focused on accelerating growth across the European space sector. The event, held at ExCeL London, is expected to draw more than 5,400 delegates, 250 exhibitors and 200 speakers from 50 countries, with participation from organizations including the European Space Agency (ESA), NASA, the UN, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the U.K. Space Agency. The expo comes as European policymakers seek to build momentum following the inaugural launch of the Ariane 6 rocket and amid increased emphasis on dual-use space technologies spanning defense, communications, navigation and Earth observation. Programming will include a Defence and National Security summit, forums on investment and space law, and an international government and very important person (VIP) program, reflecting broader efforts to strengthen collaboration, attract capital and expand Europe's role in the global space economy.

*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)**

### **Lunar Surface Wi-Fi Transceiver**

**National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

Close Date: February 26, 2026

### **Ultra-Low Power Bistable Display for Lunar Surface EVA Operations**

**National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

Close Date: February 26, 2026

### **High-Rate Mobility Request for Information**

**National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

Close Date: February 28, 2026

### **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

### **Private Sector Participation in Domestic and International Events on Spaceflight Safety,**

## Responsible Practices, and Commercial Space

U.S. Department of State

Close Date: December 31, 2026

## Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

### Engineering Services and Science Capability Augmentation (ESSCA) II

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: March 11, 2026

## Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed rules.

## Upcoming Space Events

### Warfare Symposium

AFA

February 23-25, 2026

### Geospatial Intelligence for Defence & Security Conference

DGI

February 23-25, 2026

### Beyond Earth Symposium

Beyond Earth Institute

February 24-25, 2026

### 2026 Space Beach Law Lab Conference

Space Beach Law Lab

February 24-26, 2026

### ASCENDxTEXAS

AIAA

February 25-26, 2026

### 11th National Space Policy Secretariat Symposium

Cabinet Office's Space Development Strategy Promotion Secretariat

February 27, 2026

### 3rd Annual Business of Space Summit

UAH

March 1-3, 2026

**Space-Comm Europe 2026**

Space-Comm Europe

March 4-5, 2026

**Astronomy and Astrophysics Committee**

NSF-NASA-DOE

March 6, 2026

**12th Joint Space Operations Summit**

DSI

March 4-5, 2026

**NOAA's Science Advisory Board**

NOAA

March 10-11, 2026

**Goddard Space Science Symposium**

AAS

March 12-13, 2026

**2026 Defense Forum**

AIAA

March 17-20, 2026

**SATShow Week 2026**

Satellite x GovMilSpace

March 23-26, 2026

Learn more about our Space Law and Policy practice.

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## Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

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