Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

Last week, the FCC adopted its Space Modernization Order, a sweeping effort to streamline satellite licensing and accelerate commercial space activity.

Beyond Washington, the UK is preparing to roll out a new national space strategy backed by increased budgets and reforms. The Chinese government shines a light on who's who in the Chinese space industry when it published the membership roster for its national commercial space consortium, revealing 271 participants from across the country's space sector.

The pace of all this space activity is reflected in the numbers. According to the Space Foundation's newly released State of the Global Space Economy report, the global space economy grew 12% last year to reach $686 billion.

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

Akin Spotlight

Akin recently welcomed Jonathan Markman as senior counsel in its TMT and Space practices. Jon joins the firm from the FCC's Space Bureau, where he led satellite licensing, rulemakings, and initiatives supporting emerging space technologies.

In the White House/Executive Branch

Articles and Quotes

FCC Votes to Speed Satellite Licensing Over House Science Pushback (*Politico*)
On July 22, the FCC voted 3-0 to adopt its **Space Modernization Order**, establishing a new regulatory framework intended to streamline satellite licensing and support the rapid growth of commercial space activities. The order is designed to simplify the licensing process for increasingly large satellite constellations by reducing administrative burdens, accelerating application reviews and focusing the agency's oversight on spectrum management, harmful interference, national security and orbital debris. The vote proceeded despite objections from

House Science, Space and Technology Committee Chairman Brian Babin (R-TX) and Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), who sent before the vote, urging the FCC to delay consideration of the order over concerns that the agency may be expanding beyond its statutory authority into broader space policy issues. The lawmakers also criticized the FCC for failing to respond to congressional inquiries and warned they could pursue legislative or oversight action. FCC Chair Brendan Carr defended the order as providing a regulatory framework capable of supporting future commercial space operations at scale, while Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Ted Cruz (R-TX) publicly endorsed the reforms, citing their importance for U.S. economic competitiveness and national security.

Trump's Pick to Lead Space Force Defends Plan to More Than Double Budget (SpaceNews)
During his July 16 confirmation hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Lt. Gen. Douglas Schiess endorsed the Trump administration's proposed $71.1 billion FY 2027 budget for the U.S. Space Force, arguing the increase is necessary to counter China's rapidly expanding military space capabilities. Schiess testified that the proposed funding would primarily support new space systems, weapons, infrastructure, training and operational capabilities rather than personnel, although the budget would add approximately 2,800 Guardians and 2,000 civilian employees. He also emphasized the need to rapidly expand the Space Force's role in supporting missile defense, nuclear command and control, long-range strike operations and space superiority missions while protecting U.S. satellites from increasingly sophisticated counterspace threats. Schiess further expressed support for preserving the Space Development Agency's rapid acquisition model as it is integrated into the Space Force, endorsed continued investment in the Golden Dome missile defense initiative for its broader space capabilities, advocated leveraging commercial providers for non-kinetic services while retaining military control of offensive space systems and highlighted the importance of incorporating lessons from recent conflicts, strengthening electronic warfare resilience and expanding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) for space domain awareness.

NASA's Nuclear Mars Mission to Cost Over $2 Billion (*Politico*)
NASA administrator Jared Isaacman confirmed that the agency estimates its proposed Space Reactor-1 Freedom mission will cost approximately $2.1 billion, excluding the cost of the associated SkyFall payload it will transport to Mars. Planned for launch in late 2028, the mission is intended to serve as the first in-space flight demonstration of nuclear electric propulsion and will carry three helicopters to support scientific exploration and identify potential water resources on the Martian surface. To accelerate development, NASA plans to repurpose the Power and Propulsion Element originally built for the canceled Gateway lunar station and is partnering with the DOE to design and assemble the spacecraft's nuclear reactor. According to NASA, the mission will be funded through the agency's exploration account and previously appropriated reconciliation funding, with planned expenditures of $640 million in FY 2026, $890 million in FY 2027, $415 million in FY 2028 and $180 million in FY 2029. The agency stated that the cost estimate does not include the SkyFall science mission, which will be funded separately.

NRO Director Nominee Sees Relationship with Space Force Evolving (*Air & Space Forces*

Magazine)
During a July 14 Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing, National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) Director nominee L. Roger Mason Jr. described the relationship between the NRO and the U.S. Space Force as a model for transitioning operational space capabilities from the intelligence community to the military. Mason pointed to the Silent Barker space domain awareness constellation and the Ground Moving Target Indicator (GMTI) satellite program as examples where the NRO leveraged its acquisition expertise and existing technology to rapidly field capabilities before transitioning operational responsibility to the Space Force. He indicated that follow-on programs, including the Air Moving Target Indicator (AMTI) effort and the SG-XX space surveillance constellation, will increasingly be acquired and managed directly by the Space Force, reflecting a clearer division of responsibilities in which the NRO focuses on strategic intelligence collection while the Space Force develops operational military space capabilities. Mason did not endorse proposals to merge the two organizations, instead emphasizing that their distinct missions and close coordination strengthen U.S. space superiority. During the same hearing, Air Force Assistant Secretary for Space Acquisition and Integration nominee Erich Hernandez-Baquero stated that, if confirmed, he would prioritize implementing DoW's acquisition reforms, with particular attention to modernizing legacy space programs through digital engineering, commercial technology integration and mission-based acquisition portfolios.

NGA Seeks Industry Input on Future GEOINT Analytic Technologies (*ExecutiveGov*)
The National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) issued a classified request for information (RFI) to assess commercial capabilities supporting its **Future Geospatial Intelligence (GEOINT) Analytic Technologies** initiative, a market research effort intended to inform the agency's next generation of geospatial intelligence analytics. Posted on July 15 through the classified Intelligence Community Acquisition Research Center (ARC) portal, the sources-sought notice seeks industry feedback on advanced analytic technologies that could support NGA's evolving GEOINT mission, including ongoing efforts to mature AI-enabled analytic capabilities and AI model accreditation. The RFI is not a formal solicitation but is intended to help shape future acquisition strategies and technology requirements. Access to the full requirements is limited to vendors with top secret/sensitive compartmented information (TS/SCI) clearances using classified networks, and industry responses are due by August 10.

Federal Agency Space News

Federal Communications Commission

FCC Adopts Groundbreaking Overhaul of Space Bureau's Licensing Process (July 22, 2026)

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NASA Joins Genesis Mission to Accelerate AI-Driven Discovery (July 22, 2026)

NASA to Host Media Briefing on Roman Telescope, Launching Next Month (July 21, 2026)

New NASA Earth Missions Gear Up to Start Science Flights (July 20, 2026)

NASA Astronaut Anil Menon, Crewmates Arrive at Space Station (July 14, 2026)

Office of Space Commerce

Director Jordan Testifies on OSC's 'Space Commerce Certification' (July 15, 2026)

U.S. Department of State

United States Welcomes Mauritius's Signing of the Artemis Accords (July 17, 2026)

United States Welcomes Serbia's Signing of the Artemis Accords (July 16, 2026)

U.S. Department of War

DoW Partners With the Genesis Mission to Proliferate AI for Science (July 22, 2026)

Hegseth, Caine Testify in Support of Supplemental Budget Request (July 21, 2026)

DoW Invests $7.1M to Enhance Space Solar Cell Coverglass Manufacturing (July 17, 2026)

Office of Strategic Capital Introduces National Security Fund Finance Program (July 14, 2026)

U.S. Space Force

Remarks By CSO Gen. Chance Saltzman at the 2026 Global Air and Space Chiefs Conference (July 16, 2026)

USSF Accepting Proposals for Fifth Research Opportunity Under the USSF University Consortium (July 15, 2026)

Space Development Agency Issues Awards to Build 36 Accelerated Missile Defense Tracking Layer Satellites for Tranche 3 In Support of Golden Dome for America (July 14, 2026)

Space Force Aligns for Wartime Footing with Third Tranche of PAEs (July 10, 2026)

On the Hill

Articles and Quotes

Chairman Babin, Ranking Member Lofgren Urge FCC to Postpone Vote on 'Space Modernization' Rules (House SST)

On July 21, House Science, Space and Technology Committee Chairman Brian Babin and Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren sent a letter to Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Brendan Carr urging the Commission to postpone consideration of its Report and Order (R&O) and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FNPRM) related to its "Space Modernization for the 21st Century" proposal. In the letter, the bipartisan leaders urge the Commission to "postpone its consideration" of the proposal and "confine its regulations to the authority Congress has granted the FCC regarding radiofrequency communications licensing for private space systems." The Chairman and Ranking Member also note that they did not receive a response to their February 2026 letter and write that "the concerns we identified in our February letter remain" as the Commission moves forward with the R&O and FNPRM. The members further wrote that Committee letters are intended "to establish dialogue, exchange information, and revisit our respective roles and authorities." The letter concludes, "In the absence of responsive action, constructive dialogue, and a meaningful exchange of information on this matter, we must consider all appropriate legislative and oversight tools available to us."

Office of Space Commerce's New Authorization Framework Should Balance Innovation with Safety, Lawmakers Say (*Aerospace America*)

During a House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics **hearing**, lawmakers examined the Office of Space Commerce's (OSC) proposed Space Commerce Certification, a new authorization framework intended to streamline approvals for emerging commercial space activities that are not clearly addressed under existing regulatory authorities. According to the proposal, the voluntary certification would serve as a centralized review process for activities such as on-orbit servicing, debris removal, commercial space stations, in-space manufacturing and orbital computing, while evaluating national security, space safety, international obligations and foreign policy considerations. OSC Director Taylor Jordan stated that the framework is designed to provide a clearer regulatory pathway for novel missions and could function as a "one-stop shop" that complements existing licensing requirements administered by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), FCC and Department of Commerce. Members of Congress emphasized that any streamlined approval process must adequately address collision risks, taxpayer liability and the increasing congestion of the space environment. The hearing also highlighted uncertainty over the office's capacity to implement the proposal, as the Trump administration's fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget request would reduce OSC funding to $11 million, while both the House and Senate appropriations bills propose substantially higher funding levels of $50 million and $60 million, respectively.

After House Passes NDAA, Attention Turns to Senate (*CQ Defense*)

The House approved the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2027 (**H.R. 8800**) by a 216-212 vote, authorizing approximately $1.15 trillion for the Department of War (DoW), the National Nuclear Security Administration and other national security programs. The largely party-line vote reflected Democratic opposition to the bill's overall funding level, provisions related to U.S. military operations in Iran and several floor amendments, while a small number of

Republicans opposed the measure over separate concerns. With House passage complete, attention now shifts to the Senate, which has yet to consider its version of the NDAA before the two chambers can begin negotiations on a final conference agreement.

Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

On July 22, the House passed the NDAA for FY 2027 (**H.R. 8800**) by a vote of 216-212.

Rep. Don Beyer (D-VA) **introduced** the Modernizing Aeronautical Standards Act (**H.R. 9662**), which would require the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to conduct a study on the modernization of aeronautical standards.

Rep. Mike Haridopolos (R-FL) **introduced** the Space Ready 2.0 Act (**H.R. 9651**), which would authorize the NASA administrator to conduct a pilot program for investment in infrastructure projects at NASA Centers. Sen. Ashley Moody (R-FL) introduced companion legislation (**S. 4905**) in the Senate.

Rep. Andrea Salinas (D-OR) **introduced** **H. Res. 1442**, to support the designation of July 20, 2026, as "National Moon Landing Day."

Rep. Rick Crawford (R-AR) **introduced** the Intelligence Authorization Act for FY 2027 (**H.R. 9624**), which would authorize appropriations for FY 2027 for military activities of the DoW, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy (DOE), and prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year.

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

Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(July 20, 2026 - July 31, 2026)

On July 15, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) held a **hearing** to consider the nomination of Hon. Walter "Jay" Clayton to be Director of National Intelligence.

On July 15, the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology (SST) held a **hearing** to review the Office of Space Commerce's mission authorization proposal.

On July 16, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) held a **hearing** to consider the nomination of Lieutenant General Douglas Schiess, USSF to be general and Chief of Space Operations.

On July 20, the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) held a closed **markup** of the Intelligence Authorization Act for FY 2027 (**H.R. 9624**).

On July 21, HPSCI held a **hearing** on confronting the next generation of threats.

On July 21, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation (CST) Subcommittee on Science, Manufacturing and Competitiveness held a **hearing** to examine measuring what matters, focusing on science, standards and strategic competition.

On July 21, House SST held a **markup** to consider pending legislation.

On July 21, SSCI held a closed **business meeting** to consider pending intelligence matters.

On July 21, the Senate Committee on Appropriations held a **hearing** to review the President's supplemental funding request of June 24, 2026.

On July 21, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On July 22, House SST held a **hearing** to examine the priorities of the FY 2027 research and technology enterprise.

On July 22, Senate CST held a **business meeting** to consider nominations and pending legislation.

On July 22, SSCI held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

International

Articles & Quotes

Breaking Down the $686B Space Economy (*Payload Space*)
The global space economy reached a record $686 billion in 2025, representing 12% year-over-year growth and continuing a five-year compound annual growth rate approaching 10% percent according to the Space Foundation's annual **State of the Global Space Economy** report. Commercial activity accounted for $544.3 billion, or nearly 80% of the total market, while government space spending reached $141 billion across 53 national budgets. The report found that positioning, navigation and timing (PNT) services and associated ground equipment continue to generate the majority of commercial revenue, while higher-growth sectors include satellite manufacturing, launch services, in-space servicing and space situational awareness. The report also projects continued growth in defense-related space spending, driven by increased investments in sovereign space capabilities and national security programs, alongside rising private investment in emerging technologies such as reusable launch systems, orbital

infrastructure, advanced spacecraft and space-based computing.

UK Government Preparing to Release New Space Strategy (*SpaceNews*)
The U.K. government is preparing to release a new national space strategy that will align civil, commercial and national security space activities under a whole-of-government framework centered on two strategic objectives: economic growth and national security. According to Rebecca Evernden, the strategy will prioritize four areas of capability: satellite communications, launch, space domain awareness and space sustainability, and in-space servicing and manufacturing. The strategy follows the Ministry of Defence's recently announced **Defence Investment Plan**, which includes an additional £2.3 billion for military satellite communications and £880 million for space-based intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) and space control through 2030, as well as plans for a sovereign ISR constellation and expanded deep-space tracking cooperation with the U.S. and Australia. Evernden also emphasized that international partnerships, particularly with the European Space Agency (ESA), the U.S. and Japan, will remain central to the U.K.'s space strategy as the government seeks to strengthen commercial competitiveness, expand international collaboration and integrate civil and defense space priorities under the recently reorganized U.K. Space Agency within the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Space Force Chief Nominee: China Going 'Breathtakingly Fast' with Space Weapons (*Air & Space Forces Magazine*)
During his July 16 Senate Armed Services Committee confirmation hearing, Space Force Chief of Space Operations nominee Douglas Schiess warned that China's development of counterspace and space superiority capabilities is advancing at a "breathtakingly fast" pace, citing anti-satellite weapons, electronic warfare capabilities and an expanding ISR architecture designed to detect and target U.S. aircraft carriers, bombers and other military assets across the Indo-Pacific. Schiess testified that the Space Force must develop capabilities to deny and degrade China's space-enabled targeting network while protecting U.S. satellite constellations that support communications, navigation, missile warning and joint military operations. He also defended the Golden Dome missile defense initiative, noting that investments in tracking, communications and data systems would strengthen broader space superiority capabilities in addition to missile defense. Looking ahead, Schiess highlighted the service's planned expansion from approximately 10,000 Guardians to nearly 20,000 over the next five years, supported by significant hiring of both military and civilian personnel, while emphasizing the need to rebuild the civilian acquisition workforce and accelerate the delivery of new space capabilities to address evolving threats.

Russia Sends American and Two Cosmonauts to Space Station with Rare NASA Chief Visit (*Reuters*)
A Russian Soyuz MS-29 spacecraft launched NASA astronaut Anil Menon and Roscosmos cosmonauts Pyotr Dubrov and Anna Kikina to the International Space Station (ISS), continuing the U.S.-Russia crew exchange program despite broader geopolitical tensions. The mission also marked the first visit by NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman to the Baikonur Cosmodrome since

2018, where he met with Roscosmos Director Dmitry Bakanov to discuss continued ISS cooperation. The launch resumed crewed operations from Baikonur's recently repaired Site 31 launch complex following extensive repairs and comes as NASA and Roscosmos continue to coordinate on ISS operations, including ongoing efforts to address air leaks aboard the aging station.

China Unveils Members of State-Backed Commercial Space Consortium (*SpaceNews*)
China's State Administration of Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND) published the membership roster for its new national commercial space consortium, identifying 271 organizations that the government recognizes as key participants in the country's commercial space sector. Established in 2025 as a China National Space Administration initiative, the consortium spans nine industry segments, including launch services, satellite manufacturing, data applications, ground systems, technology innovation and financial services, and is intended to coordinate policy implementation, industry standards and commercial development. The membership includes many of China's leading commercial launch providers, such as LandSpace, Galactic Energy, iSpace, Space Pioneer, as well as state-linked launch companies including CAS Space, China Rocket and Expace. The roster also highlights Beijing's strategic priorities by including companies developing direct-to-device satellite communications, non-terrestrial networks (NTN), commercial human spaceflight, hypersonic spaceplanes, in-space servicing, orbital computing and advanced satellite constellations. The consortium further incorporates banks, insurers and investment firms, signaling the establishment of dedicated financial support mechanisms for China's commercial space industry.

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)

Astrophysics Science Operations Support
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: July 29, 2026

Potential Use of the Outer Continental Shelf for Offshore Space Launch and Re-Entry Activities
Bureau of Ocean Energy Management
Cose Date: August 7, 2026

Future GEOINT Analytic Technologies
National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency
Close Date: August 10, 2026

NASA To Research, Evaluate, Assess, and Treat (TREAT) Astronauts Act

National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: August 10, 2026

Unified Network and Navigation Operations (UNNO)
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: August 15, 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)

Engineering Services and Science Capability Augmentation (ESSCA) II
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: August 6, 2026

Geostationary Littoral Imaging and Monitoring Radiometer (GLIMR) Access to Space (ATS) "GLIMR ATS"
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Close Date: September 4, 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

Orbital Data Centers & Space Sustainability Implications
SWF
July 29, 2026

COPSAR 2026
Committee on Space Research
August 1-9, 2026

2026 Taiwan Lunar Symposium
Taiwan Space Union
August 9-13, 2026

2026 Southern Space Conference
SIAA
August 11-12, 2026

4th Texas Area Planetary Science Meeting
TAPS
August 20-21, 2026

40th Small Satellite Conference
Small Sat
August 23-26, 2026

3rd IAA Conference on AI for Space
IAA
August 26, 2026

Aerospace Safety Advisory Panel (ASAP)
NASA
August 31, 2026

Outer Space Security Conference 2026
UNIDIR
September 8-9, 2026

2026 Air, Space & Cyber Conference
AFA
September 14-16, 2026

2026 World Space Business Week
Novaspace
September 14-17, 2026

2026 Texas Space Summit
Texas Space Summit
September 21-23, 2026

Aerospace Innovation Forum: A Golden Age of Aerospace and Defense
U.S. Chamber of Commerce
September 23, 2026

Off World Summit
Payload Space
September 23-24, 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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