



Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

Welcome to a special Monday edition of Akin's Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update. We held out hope that the NASA budget would be released in time for our Friday deadline, but that was not to be. And a lot has happened since that deadline!

NASA's FY26 budget proposes to cut funding to a level not seen since 1961 (when adjusted for inflation) while slashing dozens of missions and thousands of employees. However, some Republicans on the Hill have declared the budget DOA. Other big news came over the weekend when President Trump withdrew the nomination of Jared Isaacman to serve as NASA Administrator on Saturday.

As for the items that occurred before last Friday's deadline, Senators Hickenlooper (D-CO), Cantwell (D-WA), Lummis (R-WY), and Wicker (R-MS) introduced the ORBITS Act, which addresses orbital debris. President Trump also tapped Space Force General Michael Guetlein to lead the Golden Dome missile defense program.

On the international front, China launched its Tianwen-2 asteroid sample return mission. If successful, China will join the U.S. and Japan in the elite club of countries to land on an asteroid.

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

Akin Spotlight

Akin's [**Trump Executive Order Tracker**](#) provides a high-level overview of executive orders published by the new administration. These orders cut across dozens of industries and topics. The Tracker is updated as orders and Akin's in-depth analysis of specific orders are published.

Please visit Akin's [**Trump Executive Order Overview**](#) to view a matrix of the orders

On The Hill

Articles and Quotes

Payload Talks NASA Budget With Rep. George Whitesides (*Payload*)

In an interview with Payload, former Virgin Galactic Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and NASA Chief of Staff Rep. George Whitesides (D-CA) discussed NASA's FY26 budget, the National Space Council, Isaacman's nomination for administrator, commercial architectures for exploration, and the Golden Dome. In the interview, Rep. Whitesides criticized President Trump's budget request as a "full-scale assault" on NASA, but backed his endorsement for Isaacman's nomination to be head of the agency.

Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

The Senate has confirmed Troy Meink to be Secretary of the Air Force by a vote of 74-25.

Sens. John Hickenlooper (D-CO), Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Cynthia Lummis (R-WY) and Roger Wicker (R-MS) have **announced** the reintroduction of the *Orbital Sustainability* (ORBITS) Act (**S._____**), which aims to establish a demonstration system to reduce orbital debris and to require the development of uniform orbital debris standard practices. The bill has been **endorsed** by the Secure World Foundation (SWF).

On May 21, the House passed their reconciliation bill, the *One Big Beautiful Bill Act* (**H.R. 1**), by a vote of 215-214. The Senate will now consider the text.

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

Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(May 30, 2025 - June 13, 2025)

On May 15, the House Science, Space, and Technology Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee held a **hearing** titled "From Detection to Deflection: Evaluating NASA's Planetary Defense Strategy."

On May 20, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) held a **hearing** to examine the posture of the Department of the Air Force in review of the Defense Authorization Request for FY26. On June 5, the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) will also hold a **hearing** on the Department's posture.

In the White House/Executive Branch

Articles and Quotes

Jared Isaacman Out as NASA Administrator Nominee (*SpacePolicyOnline*)

The White House has announced that it is withdrawing the nomination of Jared Isaacman to serve as NASA Administrator, just a week after Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) set a final vote on Isaacman in motion. While the reasoning behind the withdrawal remains unclear, the *New York Times* has reported that the decision relates to Isaacman's past donations to Democratic candidates. The White House has stated that the next Administrator will lead Martian ambitions, and that it is "essential that the next leader of NASA is in complete alignment with President Trump's America First agenda." A replacement nominee is expected soon.

NASA Budget Would Cancel Dozens of Science Missions, Lay Off Thousands (*SpaceNews*)

NASA has released its budget request for FY26, expanding upon cuts initially proposed in the White House's "skinny" budget released in early May. The document details large cuts to the agency's science program, proposing to cancel dozens of earth, planetary, astrophysics, and heliophysics missions in a near 50% funding cut from FY25. The budget also proposes to end the Space Launch System (SLS) and Orion programs after Artemis III, along with cancelling Gateway. In their place, the agency is proposing \$864 million in new funding for a "Commercial Moon to Mars (M2M) Infrastructure and Transportation Program," aimed at replacing the legacy Artemis programs and developing a space suit for Martian exploration. The M2M program would also take over the Commercial Lunar Payload Services program. Some stakeholders, including the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA), have voiced concerns about the cuts relating to the workforce and to maintaining U.S. leadership in space.

Trump Taps Space Force General to Lead \$175 Billion Golden Dome Missile Defense Program (*SpaceNews*)

The White House has tapped the United States Space Force's Vice Chief of Space Operations, Gen. Michael Guetlein, to lead the administration's Golden Dome missile defense program. Gen. Guetlein, the former commander of Space Systems Command (SSC), has compared the scope of the Golden Dome to the Manhattan Project. During a May 20 Oval Office briefing, President Trump announced the appointment, as well as a \$175 billion architecture for the program, expected to be completed within three years. The House has approved \$25 billion for the project in their reconciliation bill, though that funding is tentative until Senate passage.

US Space Chief Warns of Emerging Threats from China and Russia (*POLITICO*)

Space Force Chief of Space Operations Gen. B. Chance Saltzman has voiced concerns with emerging space tech threats from China and Russia, warning that the Space Force will need to bolster space capacities in the near future to counteract foreign capabilities.

At *POLITICO*'s Security Summit, Gen. Saltzman cited China's "kill web" of satellites, Russia's kinetic kill capabilities and orbital nuclear goals, and the recently announced International Lunar Research Station, the joint Chinese-Russian initiative to build a nuclear-powered permanent base on the moon, as some of the largest threats against the current U.S. space posture.

NASA Says Long-Running Budget Shortfalls May Lead to ISS Crew and Research Reductions (*SpaceNews*)

NASA has announced that a budget shortfall has led the agency to consider cuts to International Space Station (ISS) funding, even before the White House's proposed \$500 million cut to the ISS in

its “skinny budget” for FY26. Dana Weigel, the ISS program manager, stated on May 20 that the program has been faced with a multi-year budget shortfall resulting in less cargo on the station, which has forced NASA to consider reductions to both workforce and research. Though there have been industry concerns about ISS cargo capacities, this marks the first time that a NASA official has spoken publicly about any issues.

The Real Golden Dome Opportunity - Defense Acquisition Reform (*SpaceNews*)

In an op-ed, a *SpaceNews* contributor lays out three policy tensions that could make or break the Golden Dome program: balancing commercial solutions and alternative acquisition methods with an institutional need for strict programmatic management, weighing the desire for capabilities innovation with the need for nurturing the industrial ecosystem, and managing the integration of existing command-and-control systems across services with the impulse to pursue new, more destructive capabilities.

Federal Agency Space News

Department of Defense

Spacecom Leader Outlines Vision for Space Security (May 2, 2025)

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NASA Marks Milestones for Artemis III Orion Spacecraft at Kennedy (May 28, 2025)

SpaceX Dragon Splashes Down off the Coast of California (May 25, 2025)

NASA Supports Artemis Accords Signatories Advancing Exploration (May 22, 2025)

Earth Series: What's Next for NASA Earth Science (May 20, 2025)

U.S. Space Force

Department of the Air Force Updated Guidance on Implementing Policy on Prioritizing Military Excellence and Readiness (Accessions, Retention and Voluntary Separation, Identification) (May 23, 2025)

27th SecAF's First Letter to the Force (May 22, 2025)

Remarks by Chief of Space Operations Gen. Chance Saltzman at the USGIF GEOINT Symposium (May 22, 2025)

SecAF Highlights FY26 Priorities, Strategic Challenges in SASC Testimony (May 21, 2025)

International

Articles & Quotes

Report on the United Nations World Space Forum 2024: Sustainable Space for Sustainability on Earth (UNOOSA)

The United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA) has released their report on the United Nations World Space Forum 2024, held from December 3-5 in Bonn, Germany. The forum, with the theme "Sustainable space for sustainability on Earth," had attendees from 93 states and covered topics including the "Space2030" Agenda, the ongoing development of global space governance, and the alignment of international space activities with sustainable development goals. Please find the full report [here](#).

China Launches Tianwen-2 Asteroid Sample-Return Mission (SpacePolicyOnline)

On May 28, 2025, China successfully launched its Tianwen-2 mission from the Xichang Satellite Launch Center, marking its first endeavor to return samples from an asteroid. The spacecraft is set to rendezvous with the near-Earth asteroid 469219 Kamo'oalewa (2016 HO3) in July 2026, where it will collect 20--100 grams of material using both "touch-and-go" and "anchor-and-attach" sampling techniques. After returning the samples to Earth in November 2027, Tianwen-2 will proceed to study the main-belt comet 311P/PANSTARRS, arriving in 2035 for a year-long observation. This mission aims to shed light on the origins of the early solar system and signifies China's growing capabilities in deep-space exploration, positioning it alongside the United States and Japan in asteroid sample-return missions.

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)

NASA Search and Rescue System Support Contract

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: June 5, 2025

Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

Private Astronaut Missions 5 and 6 Flight Opportunities

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: July 10, 2025

Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed NPRMs.

Upcoming Space Events

Space Tech Expo USA

Smarter Shows

June 2-4, 2025

Outer Planets Assessment Group

NASA

June 3-5, 2025

ISAM Conference

UK Space Agency

June 4-5, 2025

2025 Space Law Symposium

American Bar Association

June 5, 2025

Conversation with Rep. George Whitesides (D-CA)

Space News

June 10, 2025

Space Studies and Aeronautics and Space Engineering Boards Joint Meeting

National Academies

June 10-13, 2025

Paris Air Show

SIAE

June 16-22, 2025

Space Threats and Acquisition Forum

NSSA

June 18, 2025

Luncheon with NRO Director Christopher Scolese

MSBR

June 18, 2025

International Space Development Conference

National Space Society

June 19-22, 2025

International Planetary Probe Workshop

NASA Langley, ESA

June 23-27, 2025

Smallsat and Space Access Summit

Defense Strategies Institute

June 25-26, 2025

68th COPUOS Session

United Nations

June 25-July 4, 2025

UK Space Conference 2025

UK Space Agency

July 16-17, 2025

ASCEND 2025

AIAA

July 22-24, 2025

Learn more about our Space Law and Policy practice.

[Learn More](#)

Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact:

Authors



Michael Mineiro
Senior Counsel
Washington, D.C.



Thomas McCarthy
Partner
Washington, D.C.



Carlos Bermudez
Partner
Los Angeles



Jennifer Richter
Partner
Washington, D.C.



Hans Rickhoff
Partner
Washington, D.C.



Steven Rowings
Partner
Washington, D.C.



Marta Thompson
Senior Counsel
Washington, D.C.



Lamar Smith
Senior Consultant and
Former Member of
Congress
Washington, D.C.

Contributors



Chase Hamilton
Associate
Washington, D.C.



Sharanya Sriram
Associate
Washington, D.C.



Brandon Brodwater
Public Law & Policy
Fellow
Washington, D.C.



© 2025 Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP. All rights reserved. Attorney advertising. This document is distributed for informational use only; it does not constitute legal advice and should not be used as such. Prior results do not guarantee a similar outcome. Receipt of this information does not create an attorney-client relationship. Do not act upon this information without seeking professional counsel. All content is presented by Akin and cannot be copied or rebroadcasted without express written consent. Akin is the practicing name of Akin Gump LLP, a New York limited liability partnership authorized and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority under number 267321. A list of the partners is available for inspection at Eighth Floor, Ten Bishops Square, London E1 6EG. For more information about Akin Gump LLP, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP and other associated entities under which the Akin network operates worldwide, please see our Legal Notices page.

[Update Your Preferences](#) | [Unsubscribe](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Legal Notices](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

This email was sent by: 2001 K Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20006-1037