



Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

Over the past couple of weeks, Congress moved a number of key space-related spending bills, and signaled support for the Pentagon's acquisition reform agenda (albeit with a few congressionally mandated guardrails). Beyond Washington, Japan marked its first cargo mission to the ISS in five years, and China experienced a significant setback to its 100 launches in 2026 goal with successive launch failures on January 16 and 17.

If you're reading this newsletter, wrinkling your brow and thinking "It's not Friday," you're right. We think the only thing better than wrapping your week up with all the space news you need will be starting it with that news. Going forward, this newsletter will publish every other Monday.

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

On The Hill

Articles and Quotes

Defense Appropriations Bill for 2026 Funds Space Force at \$26 Billion, Presses Pentagon on Golden Dome (SpaceNews)

On January 20, congressional appropriators released the fiscal year (FY) 2026 defense spending bill, which allocates \$26 billion to the U.S. Space Force, matching the administration's request. However, the bill also directs the Pentagon to provide more detailed plans for the Golden Dome missile defense initiative, which includes \$23 billion in mandatory funding authorized under the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act." Including this funding, the Space Force's budget for FY2026 approaches \$40 billion. The bill increases procurement funding by \$528 million for two additional GPS satellites and boosts investment in commercial technologies, such as \$49.5 million for alternative PNT services and \$30 million for an integrated PNT architecture. It continues support for the TacSRT program with \$80 million total, despite the administration omitting it in the budget request. Conversely, lawmakers eliminated \$277 million for MILNET, a proposed SpaceX-

built LEO communications network, citing concerns over the sole-source procurement model. They instead increased the Space Development Agency's budget by \$50 million to continue its multi-vendor strategy.

Final FY2026 NASA/NOAA Appropriations Bill Clears Senate *(Space Policy Online)*

On January 15, 2026, the Senate passed H.R. 6938, a minibuss appropriations bill funding NASA, NOAA, and other agencies for FY2026, moving the package to President Trump for final approval. The bill maintains near-FY2025 funding levels for NASA (\$24.438 billion) and NOAA (\$6.171 billion), rejecting the administration's proposed deep cuts. The measure provides \$55 million for NOAA's TraCSS program, which offers basic Space Situational Awareness data and services for spaceflight safety, despite the administration's attempt to eliminate it. The Senate specifically supported TraCSS with \$60 million, while the House urged reliance on existing DoD-proven systems. The final version allows both chambers' language to carry equal weight. Meanwhile, Trump's December 18 executive order hinted that SSA data may no longer be provided for free, replacing language from Space Policy Directive-3.

Congress Sets Guardrails for Pentagon Acquisition Reforms *(Air & Space Forces Magazine)*

Congress signaled support for the Pentagon's FY2026 acquisition reform agenda but outlined strict guardrails in a new appropriations report, emphasizing the need to balance speed with cost, performance, and scalability. Lawmakers expressed concern over recent cuts to the acquisition workforce and directed the Defense Department to develop a five-year workforce strategy. They also called for detailed risk assessments related to requirements reform and ordered a comparative GAO evaluation of the legacy and new processes. While endorsing the concept of portfolio acquisition executives (PAEs), Congress rejected DoD's request for broader budgetary flexibility, citing inadequate justification in prior reprogramming requests and cautioning against restructuring the appropriations system in the FY2027 budget.

Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) **introduced** the Financial Services and General Government and National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2026 (**H.R. 7006**), which provides FY2026 appropriations to several federal departments and agencies for activities and programs related to financial services, general government, national security, the administration of foreign affairs, and foreign assistance. The bill **passed** the House by a vote of 341 - 79.

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) **introduced** the Satellite and Telecommunications Streamlining Act (**S. 3639**) which expedites the processing of satellite and space licenses.

Sen. Andy Kim (D-NJ) **introduced** the NASA Talent Exchange Program Act (**S. 3672**) which amends title 51, United States Code, to authorize the NASA Administrator to conduct a public-private talent program.

Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK) **introduced** the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026 (**H.R. 7148**) which makes further consolidated appropriations for the departments of Defense, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development.

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

Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(January 21, 2026 - February 1, 2026)

On January 21, the House Committee on Homeland Security held an oversight **hearing** of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Science and Technology Directorate (S&T).

On January 22, the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology (SST) held a **hearing** titled “Assessing U.S. Leadership in Quantum Science and Technology.”

On January 22, the House Intelligence (HPSCI) Subcommittee on Defense Intelligence and Overhead Architecture will hold a **closed** hearing on the FY2026 Department of Defense Proposal for Cover Enhancement Authority.

On January 27, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) will hold an open nomination **hearing** of Lieutenant General Joshua M. Rudd to be Director of the National Security Agency.

On January 28, SSCI will hold a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

In the White House/Executive Branch

Articles and Quotes

White House Resubmits NASA Deputy Administrator Nominee (*SpaceNews*)

On January 13, 2026, the White House resubmitted Matt Anderson’s nomination for NASA deputy administrator after the Senate failed to act on his original May 2025 nomination. Anderson, a former U.S. Air Force officer and current senior official with the Space Force Association, was endorsed by the association, which praised his qualifications to integrate national security and civil space priorities. Meanwhile, Greg Autry, originally nominated in March 2025 to be the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) chief financial officer, declined to be renominated after his nomination lapsed at the end of the Senate session without a hearing. Autry had also been nominated unsuccessfully for the same role in 2020. Additionally, NASA still

lacks a Senate-confirmed inspector general following the December 2023 departure of Paul Martin, with no replacement yet nominated.

NASA's Nuclear Dreams *(Politico)*

NASA and the Department of Energy are pursuing an ambitious plan to deploy a 100-kilowatt nuclear reactor on the Moon by 2030, a goal now reinforced by a December White House executive order. While Congress recently allocated \$250 million to the effort in the latest appropriations package, the Idaho National Laboratory estimates total costs at nearly \$3 billion, creating budgetary challenges for NASA. The agency is hoping for cost-sharing with private companies, including Lockheed Martin, Antares and Radiant Nuclear, which are developing reactor prototypes. The 2030 timeline is considered aggressive, especially given technical hurdles such as delivery logistics and infrastructure needs on the Moon. NASA's broader FY2026 budget was finalized in a three-bill Senate package that includes \$24.4 billion for the agency—above the Trump administration's request but slightly lower than FY2025 funding.

NASA Quietly Ends Financial Support for Planetary Science Groups *(Scientific American)*

NASA will end funding for its independent planetary science advisory groups by April 2026, citing budget constraints and recent executive orders from President Trump. These "Analysis and Assessment Groups" have historically advised the agency on planetary missions and sample handling. Louise Prockter, director of NASA's Planetary Science Division, clarified that while the groups will lose funding, they are not being formally disbanded. The decision was announced in a January 16 letter and discussed during a recent meeting of the National Academies' Committee on Astrobiology and Planetary Sciences.

Defense Intelligence Agency Seeks AI Validation Tools As Hegseth Pushes for Tech Deployments *(Defense Scoop)*

The Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) released a request for information (RFI) seeking industry solutions for testing, evaluating, verifying and validating artificial intelligence (AI) systems used in intelligence operations. The agency emphasized that ensuring reliability, safety and legal compliance in AI technologies is essential for building trust within the defense intelligence community. The RFI coincides with the Trump administration's broader push to accelerate AI adoption across the federal government. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth recently outlined plans to make the Pentagon an "AI-first" force and called for full access to military data for AI development. DIA's RFI seeks input on best practices, automated tools and methodologies to support a range of intelligence functions across multiple security domains. Responses are due by February 6.

Federal Agency Space News

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NASA Unlocks Golden Age of Innovation, Exploration in Trump's First Year (January 20, 2026)

What You Need to Know About NASA's Artemis II Moon Mission (January 16, 2026)

[NASA Develops Blockchain Technology to Enhance Air Travel Safety and Security](#) (January 16, 2026)

[NASA, Department of Energy to Develop Lunar Surface Reactor by 2030](#) (January 13, 2026)

[NASA Welcomes Portugal as 60th Artemis Accords Signatory](#) (January 12, 2026)

U.S. Air Force

[U.S., Regional Partners Establish New Air Defense Operations Cell in Qatar](#) (January 14, 2026)

U.S. Department of Commerce

[OSC Seeks Input Regarding U.S.-India Space Commerce](#) (January 13, 2026)

U.S. Department of Defense

[Department of War Announces \\$1 Billion Direct-to-Supplier Investment to Secure the U.S. Solid Rocket Motor Supply Chain](#) (January 13, 2026)

[War Department Launches AI Acceleration Strategy to Secure American Military AI Dominance](#) (January 12, 2026)

U.S. Space Force

[Space Force Hosts its Third Annual Guardian Arena](#) (January 12, 2026)

International

Articles & Quotes

[NORAD Exercises, Space Force Missions: What US Military Does in Greenland](#) (*Air & Space Forces Magazine*)

U.S. and Canadian military aircraft are participating in a long-planned North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) exercise in Greenland amid heightened political attention to the territory. Pituffik Space Base, home to under 200 Space Force and Air Force personnel, plays a vital role in missile warning and satellite control. The 12th Space Warning Squadron provides early warning of missile launches, while the 23rd Space Operations Squadron manages satellite communications for Arctic operations. The Pentagon recently shifted Greenland operations from

U.S. European Command to Northern Command. NORAD emphasized that the current exercise is routine and coordinated with Denmark and Greenland authorities.

China Hit by Dual Launch Failures As Long March 3B and Ceres-2 Debut Mission

Fail (*SpaceNews*)

China experienced two high-profile launch failures on January 16-17, 2026. First, the Long March 3B rocket failed due to a third-stage anomaly, resulting in the loss of the classified Shijian-32 satellite. This marked the first full failure for the Long March 3B since 2020 and may impact future missions using similar hardware. Hours later, the debut launch of Galactic Energy's new Ceres-2 solid rocket also failed, carrying approximately six satellites including Lilac-3. This setback followed a recent successful return-to-flight of the smaller Ceres-1 and came as Galactic Energy was preparing for its next major rocket, the liquid-fueled Pallas-1. These incidents mark China's fifth and sixth launches of 2026 and represent an early blow to its goal of exceeding 100 launches this year.

Programme for the 18th European Space Conference in Brussels (*European Space Agency*)

The European Space Agency (ESA) will take part in the 18th European Space Conference in Brussels on January 27-28, 2026, with its Director General and Directors speaking at many events open to media. The European Space Conference is a key strategic event bringing together representatives from ESA, the European Commission, industry, national space agencies and other European institutions to discuss the future of Europe in space. ESA Director General Josef Aschbacher, Directors, astronauts and other high-level experts will attend this two-day conference to deliver keynote speeches, participate in panel discussions and take part in events on the ESA booth.

Countering Russian Escalation in Space (*Atlantic Council*)

A new report by the Atlantic Council argues that current U.S. space policy, Department of Defense (DoD) acquisition programs and commercial integration strategies are inadequate to counter the growing threat of Russian escalation in space. The authors call for more resilient space architecture, revised declaratory policy and enhanced integration with allies and private sector partners. They highlight the strategic implications of Russia's potential deployment of a nuclear weapon in orbit and outline how the U.S. should prepare for conflict scenarios ranging from nuclear detonations and anti-satellite (ASAT) attacks to interference with commercial satellites. The report stresses the importance of deterrence by denial of benefit over cost-imposition strategies and urges assurance efforts toward countries like China and India. It concludes with fifteen concrete policy and acquisition recommendations to help the U.S. and its partners maintain space superiority, deter aggression and manage escalation.

Japan Resumes Supply Missions to the Space Station After Five-Year Lapse (*Earth.com*)

Japan resumed International Space Station (ISS) cargo missions for the first time in five years with the launch of its new uncrewed HTV-X1 spacecraft aboard an H3 rocket. Developed by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, HTV-X1 succeeds the Kounotori series and can deliver up to 12,800 pounds of supplies, including oxygen, water, food, scientific equipment and refrigerated samples. It features improvements such as a 24-hour late loading window and the ability to support post-ISS free-flight operations for up to 18 months.

After berthing at the ISS via the Canadarm2 on October 29, 2025, it will remain for up to six months before burning up during reentry. JAXA emphasized the mission's importance in reaffirming Japan's logistical role in the ISS partnership.

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)

Collaborative Integrated Air and Missile Defense Requirements

Department of Defense

Close Date: January 30, 2026

Surface LIDAR Requirements for Extraterrestrial Rovers

National Aeronautics And Space Administration

Close Date: February 5, 2026

Artificial Intelligence Test, Evaluation, Verification, and Validation (TEVV) Capability

Department of Defense

Close Date: February 6, 2026

Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) Detection and Analysis Services

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: February 9, 2026

Space Domain Awareness (SDA)

Department of Defense

Close Date: February 20, 2026

Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Systems and Information Operations (IO) from Seabed to Space (S2ISR)

Department of Defense

Close Date: January 31, 2026

Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed rules.

Upcoming Space Events

American Meteorological Society (AMS) Annual Meeting

AMS

January 25-29, 2026

Middle East Space Conference

Novaspace

January 26-28, 2026

Lunar Surface Science Workshop (LSSW)

NASA SSERVI

January 27-28, 2026

Commercial Space Week

Spacecom

January 27-30, 2026

Space Congress 2026

Spacecom

January 28-30, 2026

Interagency Astronomy and Astrophysics Advisory Committee (AAAC)

NSF-NASA-DOE

January 29-30, 2026

Committee on Earth Science and Applications from Space

National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

February 3, 2026

Defense and Intelligence Space Conference (DISC)

NSSA

February 9-11, 2026

2026 SmallSat Symposium

SmallSat

February 10-12, 2026

Defense and Intelligence Space Conference

NSSA

February 9-11, 2026

2026 Space Traffic Conference

IAA

February 18-19, 2026

Warfare Symposium

AFA

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

Learn more about our Space Law and Policy practice.

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Questions?

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