



Space Law, Regulation and Policy Update

Good Afternoon!

As the U.S. government shutdown approaches its third week, Republicans look for defense and space funding as a lever to break the impasse, and defense budgets on both sides of the Atlantic are already reshaping the commercial space industry. Space Force looks to overhaul foreign military sales rules and wants to buy maneuverable commercial GEO satellites, and JPL announced 550 layoffs this week. Elsewhere in the world, China marked its 60th orbital launch of the year, and New Zealand's space industry is clocking tremendous growth.

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

What to Watch as Senate, House Start Crafting Conference 2026 NDAA (Air & Space Forces)

As the fiscal year (FY) 2026 National Defense Authorization Act heads to conference, lawmakers will reconcile key differences between the House and Senate versions that could reshape future force structure and modernization priorities for the Air Force and Space Force. On the space front, the House supports funding for another GPS III Follow-on satellite, while the Senate directs extended use of the Defense Meteorological Satellite Program. Final negotiations will determine the fate of these and other programs, with acquisition reform and topline differences, \$32 billion above the White House request in the Senate version, also on the table.

Thune Tries to Mix Things up With DoD Spending Bill (*Punchbowl News*)

As the government shutdown enters its third week, Senate Majority Leader John Thune is escalating pressure on Democrats by forcing a vote on the full-year FY2026 defense appropriations bill, hoping to paint opposition as obstruction of military pay restoration. Democrats, however, remain focused on health care, emphasizing the looming November 1 start of open enrollment and the expiration of enhanced premium tax credits as their key leverage point. With GOP leaders pushing procedural votes on the House-passed continuing resolution and signaling flexibility on future appropriations, both sides appear entrenched. Democrats are gambling that rising health care costs will shift public pressure onto Republicans, while Republicans are betting that defense funding will fracture Democratic unity. The Pentagon's temporary workaround to fund one military pay period has heightened urgency, with the next payday on October 31 falling just ahead of the health care inflection point.

Scientists Make the Case for NASA Science (*Space Policy Online*)

Despite a government shutdown, scientists and advocates gathered on Capitol Hill to rally against proposed deep cuts to National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) science programs. Organized by The Planetary Society, the "Day of Action to Save NASA Science" brought together nearly 300 participants and 20 organizations to urge Congress to reject the administration's proposed budget, which would slash NASA's science funding by nearly 50%. While the House and Senate bills both propose significantly higher funding levels than the White House's request, scientists warn that ongoing fiscal uncertainty demands a fundamental shift in how missions are conceived and managed. At a concurrent meeting of the National Academies, space astrophysicist Fiona Harrison urged the scientific community to prioritize cost discipline and rethink mission design, citing past programs that ran over budget and faced congressional scrutiny. As debate continues over NASA's FY2026 budget, experts emphasized the need to demonstrate to Congress that complex space science missions can be executed responsibly without sacrificing ambition.

Introduced Legislation & Legislative Updates

On October 9, The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026 (**S. 2296**) passed the Senate by a vote of 77 - 20.

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

Recent and Upcoming Congressional Hearings

(October 3, 2025 - October 17, 2025)

On October 7, the Senate Committee on Armed Services (SASC) held a **hearing** titled "Threats and Challenges Posed to Department of Defense Personnel and Operations from Adversarial Access to Publicly Available Data Coupled with Advanced Data Analysis Tools Now Widely

Available on the Commercial Market.”

On October 7, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) held a closed **briefing** on intelligence matters.

On October 8, SSCI held a **hearing** to consider nominations.

On October 9, SASC held a **hearing** to consider the nomination of: General Kenneth S. Wilsbach, U.S. Air Force (USAF) for reappointment to the grade of general and to be Chief of Staff of the Air Force.

In the White House/Executive Branch

Articles and Quotes

Space Force Pushes for FMS Reform as Case Load Spikes *(Air & Space Forces)*

The Space Force is urging reforms to the Pentagon’s foreign military sales (FMS) process as international demand for U.S.-made space systems continues to surge. Since 2023, the number of cases has nearly doubled, with the projected value of pending deals expected to reach \$10 to \$12 billion within five years. While interest has expanded beyond global positioning system (GPS) to satellites, sensors and emerging mission areas, Space Force leaders warn that outdated FMS procedures are delaying approvals and pushing allies toward commercial alternatives. Acting acquisition executive Maj. Gen. Stephen Purdy and Space Systems Command (SSC) Commander Lt. Gen. Philip Garrant have both raised concerns about capacity and speed, emphasizing the need for a faster, more transparent system and a better-staffed acquisition workforce. Reform efforts are underway, including changes to technology reviews and contracting tools, but gaps remain. The Space Force is also working to involve allies earlier in program development, particularly in next-gen data transport and space situational awareness architectures, hoping to strike a better balance between American capabilities and partner industrial interests.

More Layoffs at JPL *(SpaceNews)*

NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) announced it will lay off 550 employees this week, representing roughly 11% of its workforce, as part of a restructuring effort to streamline operations and adapt to evolving budget conditions. The layoffs, which follow multiple rounds of cuts since 2024, affect staff across technical, business and support areas and are part of a broader realignment initiative launched in July. JPL leadership emphasized the move was necessary to maintain fiscal discipline and core technical capacity amid an uncertain budget environment, though not directly tied to the ongoing government shutdown. The announcement comes as NASA science programs, including flagship missions like Mars Sample Return, face proposed reductions in the administration’s FY2026 budget request.

Space Force Plans 2026 Competition for Commercial Satellites That Can Maneuver (*Air and Space Forces*)

The Space Force plans to launch a competition in early 2026 to create a pool of commercial providers capable of delivering small, maneuverable satellites operating in geosynchronous orbit. The initiative, called Maneuverable GEO, aims to supplement aging military satellite capabilities, particularly in satellite communications (SATCOM), and ensure access to secure and high-bandwidth frequency bands. These spacecraft must be able to reposition between orbital slots or avoid threats like debris, enhancing operational flexibility. The program reflects the service's broader push toward increased mobility, hybrid commercial-military constellations and resilient satellite architecture in response to threats from peer competitors. Beyond SATCOM, officials expect the fleet to eventually support functions such as navigation, environmental monitoring and even on-orbit manufacturing. Maneuverable GEO is viewed as a critical step toward building a more agile and survivable space infrastructure.

Federal Agency Space News

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

JPL Workforce Update (October 13, 2025)

International

Articles & Quotes

New Zealand Charts Continued Growth of Its Space Industry (*SpaceNews*)

New Zealand is advancing its efforts to grow its aerospace sector, reporting a 53% increase in industry size from 2020 to 2024 and setting a goal to double its space and advanced aviation sectors by 2030. Speaking at the New Zealand Aerospace Summit, government leaders outlined plans for continued regulatory reform, defense investment, workforce development and foreign direct investment initiatives to boost competitiveness and innovation. A forthcoming defense space strategy will define targeted investments in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), secure communications and precision targeting capabilities, aligning with broader national objectives. Officials also highlighted New Zealand's geographic and regulatory advantages for launch operations, while acknowledging challenges related to capital access and specialized workforce training. Public support remains strong despite protest activity, with government figures emphasizing the sector's economic potential.

Gravity-1: Chinese Rocket Maker Orienspace Launches 3 Satellites from Ocean Barge (*The Week*)

A Chinese commercial space startup successfully launched three satellites into orbit using a solid-fueled rocket from a sea-based platform in the Yellow Sea, marking China's 60th orbital launch

of 2025. The mission reflects the growing role of China's commercial launch sector in supporting national satellite megaconstellation efforts and expanding sea-based launch capabilities. The satellites included an Earth observation system already delivering high-resolution imagery of Russia and two communications satellites, reinforcing China's intent to build strategic space assets for both civil and military use. The launch also highlights China's interest in global launch competitiveness, with commercial rockets now approaching lift capabilities comparable to international peers and future variants targeting up to 29,000 kilograms to low Earth orbit.

Defense Budgets on Both Sides of the Atlantic Reshape Space Industry (*SpaceNews*)

A transatlantic surge in defense spending is fueling a global boom in commercial space, with investors and executives pointing to recent European military buildups and the U.S. "Golden Dome" missile defense initiative as key drivers. European governments are investing heavily in sovereign space capabilities, including surveillance and communications systems, while private capital is increasingly drawn to dual-use technologies. In the U.S., renewed interest in defense tech is pushing up valuations and spurring acquisitions, particularly in satellite-enabled national security programs. The shift in sentiment follows heightened geopolitical instability and growing concern over reliance on U.S. systems, prompting global demand for space-based assets, data infrastructure and resilient commercial constellations.

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)

Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory (NBL) Facility Commercial Utilization

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: November 28, 2025

Requests for Proposals (RFPs)

Ames Research Center Facilities Support Services II (AFSS II)

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Close Date: October 21, 2025

Notices of Proposed Rulemakings (NPRMs)

No new proposed rules.

Upcoming Space Events

China, Space, and Geopolitics

WSBR

October 22, 2025

XRISM International Conference 2025

XRISM

October 20-24, 2025

The 7th Summit for Space Sustainability

Secure World Foundation

October 22-23, 2025

Planetary Science Conference 2025

Jagiellonian University

October 23-25, 2025

New Worlds 2025 Conference and Space Cowboy Ball

New Worlds

October 24-25, 2025

Von Braun Space Exploration Symposium

American Astronautical Society

October 27-29, 2025

19th ESPI Autumn Conference

European Space Policy Institute

October 28-29, 2025

Defence in Space (DiSC) 2025

GSOA

October 28-29, 2025

Silicon Valley Space Week

SVSW

October 28-30, 2025

Space Settlement Summit

NSS

November 3-4, 2025

Security for Space Systems (3S) Conference

ESA

November 4-6, 2025

3rd Annual Space Economy Summit 2025

Economist

November 5-6, 2025

2025 LSIC Fall Meeting

LSIC

November 5-6, 2025

Joint Space Operations Summit

DSI

November 5-6, 2025

23rd Meeting of the Venus Exploration Analysis Group (VEXAG)

NASA

November 5-7, 2025

4th Annual Spacepower Security Forum

Mitchell Institute

November 13, 2025

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Questions?

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