

**Statement by:**

**The Honorable Pam Melroy  
Deputy Administrator  
National Aeronautics and Space Administration**

**U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Space and Science**

**“Government Promotion of Safety and Innovation in the New Space Economy”**

**Wednesday, December 13, 2023**

Chair Cantwell, Chair Sinema, Ranking Member Cruz, Ranking Member Schmitt, distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear today to discuss this critically important topic. It is an exciting and active time for space, especially commercial space, which is playing an increasingly important role in helping NASA explore the heavens and do meaningful science.

NASA is working to return humans to the Moon under the Artemis program and then pressing forward to put the first humans on Mars. We are unlocking the secrets of the universe with missions like the James Webb Space Telescope. Our vision for NASA is that the agency takes on the hardest challenges that no one else can do. At the same time, where industry is ready, we are increasingly handing over some missions to the commercial space industry.

Let me give you a few examples. At the end of this year, the first commercial lunar lander will launch under NASA’s Commercial Lunar Payload Services initiative, which will deliver science and technology experiments to the lunar surface. NASA is one of many customers of these commercial lunar landing missions. By end of the decade, commercial space stations will be on-orbit hosting both NASA astronauts training for deep space exploration and non-U.S. government astronauts. As NASA acquires more and more of these commercial space services, the success of NASA is inextricably linked to the success of the industry.

By the way, this was by design. Over the years, NASA fostered the growth of the commercial space industry, which has increased competition and accelerated innovation in the market.

However, this innovation raises important questions about who will authorize and supervise commercial space activities. We need to balance U.S. innovation and economic growth against protecting the space environment for future use, foreign policy considerations, and national security concerns, all while meeting our international obligations.

As NASA is increasingly a customer of commercial services, increased clarity regarding who is responsible for authorizing and supervising commercial space activities, particularly where we are not the only customer, is vital for the success of NASA’s missions.

To be clear, Congress has authorized and funded NASA to use commercial capabilities in low Earth orbit and beyond. Where we are the sole customer, we feel confident that we can exercise

appropriate oversight through our contract. However, where there are multiple customers, both federal and non-federal, the U.S. government faces new challenges with respect to authorizing and properly overseeing these missions. These challenges often create risks for NASA and the U.S. government overall.

That is why NASA is pleased the National Space Council recently put forth a recommendation to Congress to extend the authorities of the Departments of Commerce and Transportation in a logical way to better enable the authorization and continued supervision of novel space activities, such as orbital services, orbital debris mitigation, space-based manufacturing, commercial human spaceflight, and the recovery and use of space resources. This proposal will enhance safety of NASA operations when we are using commercial services by utilizing the existing expertise and capabilities of relevant Federal regulatory agencies.

The intent of this supervision is not to stifle nor slow down industry, but rather to work *with* industry in advancing commercial space. We want to preserve safety, but also economic opportunity. We want it to be flexible because NASA knows that technology evolves and we must evolve along with it. And we want the process to be timely, transparent, and efficient so it can keep up with the rapid growth of commercial space activities. We are and will continue to be a strong advocate for our commercial partners in the interagency especially where their success is vital to our mission.

The space industry needs a clear, predictable, timely, and flexible process to initiate non-Governmental space activities safely and successfully. NASA needs a robust and thriving space industry to achieve our own goals. The risk to all space activities of not having some form of coordinated oversight is too great.

To ensure the certainty of future novel commercial activities critical to NASA's mission – from commercial lunar landers, to resource extraction, to space nuclear power – and ensure novel commercial activities do not interfere with NASA missions, it is critical we get the authorization and supervision regulatory regime right.

NASA looks forward to continuing to work with industry, our interagency partners, and Congress to strike the appropriate balance between adherence to responsible, safe behavior, and nurturing our growing space economy.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss this important and exciting topic. I look forward to answering your questions.