SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Full Committee
Nomination Hearing
Wednesday, December 3, 2025, at 10:00 A.M.

REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Jared Isaacman

COVER PAGE

CHAIRMAN TED CRUZ (R-TX)

1. During your testimony, when I asked about the architecture of the Gateway program and your plans to utilize the lunar orbiting station's capabilities, you noted that "*the President of the United States would be very excited to see a lunar base*." While a lunar base is certainly part of the overall Artemis architecture, the Lunar Gateway is intended to serve as a cislunar habitation, staging, and logistics point to enable more robust long-duration missions in cislunar orbit and on the lunar surface – Gateway as a lunar station plays a critical role in enabling the future Artemis missions.

    a. Can you expand upon your plans for Gateway and unlocking the cislunar orbit?

    b. Can you clarify your response and explain how you intend to support the Gateway cislunar space station program, including how you plan to utilize the One Big Beautiful Bill Act funding consistent with congressional intent to develop and sustain an orbital cislunar platform?

Answer: As I noted in my opening remarks and testimony, I believe it is essential for the United States to return to the Moon ahead of our strategic competitors and to build the infrastructure required for an enduring presence in and around the lunar environment. I will, of course, follow the law as written in carrying out those objectives as urgently as possible.

2. Submitted on behalf of Senator Britt: During your line of questioning, I appreciated your commitment to utilizing the One Big Beautiful Bill Act dollars as outlined by the law. You also responded that the funds afford NASA with the opportunity to utilize additional heavy lift vehicles for the Artemis IV and V missions. Do you commit to using the SLS rocket for Artemis IV and V as directed by Congress and stated in the law?

Answer: SLS is the fastest path to achieving America's near-term lunar objectives through Artemis V. Pivoting to another architecture earlier than contemplated in the One Big Beautiful Bill could place the nation at an unacceptable risk of a strategic capability gap. I will, of course, follow the law.

SENATOR ROGER WICKER (R-MS)

Question #1: John C. Stennis Space Center

The John C. Stennis Space Center is home to NASA's largest propulsion and engine test site. The Stennis Space Center has played a pivotal role in developing and testing our launch capabilities from the beginning of our space program. It also hosts commercial space companies including Rocket Lab, Relativity Space, and L3Harris. As NASA increasingly relies on the commercial space sector to execute its mission, industry at the Stennis Space Center is growing. Because of the Stennis Center's location and buffer zone, it is an ideal place for new commercial space companies to invest in or move to. At the Stennis Space Center, NASA supports the commercial space industry by providing numerous services, including sharing water and chemicals, such as nitrogen and hydrogen.

Question: Thank you for your commitment to expanding space industry in the United States. As America's largest rocket propulsion test site, the John C. Stennis Space Center exemplifies how NASA can work with commercial space industry.

Commercial space tenants at the Stennis Space Center are revitalizing existing test stands and building new stands to support their rocket propulsion testing. Modernizing existing test infrastructure can provide cost savings to the company and NASA. Do you agree that existing test infrastructure can support both ongoing and future space missions for NASA and commercial space industry?

Answer: Stennis Space Center is a great example of a NASA center evolving to support both government and commercial programs. While Stennis continues to support several government efforts, it has also revitalized key test platforms and infrastructure to successfully enable commercial industry.

Question #2:

In your testimony, and publicly released statements, you have outlined your plan for the future of NASA. This plan prioritizes removing excessive bureaucracy, putting more astronauts in space for enduring missions, enhancing partnerships for scientific exploration, maximizing an orbital economy, and investing in and certifying commercial space missions.

Question: As the Administrator, you will have the opportunity to implement your vision for NASA and shape the future of the United States' space capabilities. Under your leadership, how will NASA support and transform the Stennis Space Center to ensure its long-term success?

Answer: Stennis Space Center is a national treasure for engine testing and already serves as a model for evolving to meet current and future missions. Stennis has attracted investments and tenants from some of the most notable commercial space companies, and I see that trend continuing well into the future.

Question # 3: Reconciliation Funding

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act included funding for projects that will support Mississippi's space equities including $700 million for the Mars Telecommunications Orbiter, $120 million for infrastructure projects at the Stennis Space Center, and $4.1 million for the Space Launch System, which will enable the United States to continue its missions to the Moon. The Senate marked up Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2026 includes $48.2 million for the Rocket Propulsion Test Program as well as accompanying report language, which will ensure that the Stennis Space Center can continue its critical work.

Question: The historic investments in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act will bolster the Stennis Space Center's equities through critical infrastructure improvements and engagement with the commercial space sector. Will you commit to quickly obligating funds provided by the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, once confirmed? Will you also commit to working with commercial entities to rapidly move forward on the Mars Telecommunications Orbiter program?

Answer: Yes. I believe it is imperative for NASA to move with urgency in achieving our near-term lunar objectives, for which considerable funding and support have been provided in the One Big Beautiful Bill. I further believe, consistent with my prior testimony, that NASA is capable of undertaking multiple world-changing missions in parallel. In that context, investments in the communications capabilities required to support future Mars missions is certainly worth exploring.

SENATOR JERRY MORAN (R-KS)

1. How critical is NASA's Aeronautics Mission Directorate initiatives such as Hi-CAM and high-speed flight programs? How will you support those programs while also enhancing partnership with industry?

   Answer: As a pilot, I am very excited about the Aeronautics Mission Directorate and ensuring an intense focus on research and test programs that push the boundaries of speed, altitude, and the materials and sciences that underpin the competitiveness of our aerospace industry. The Hi-CAM program is certainly the kind of study NASA should be investing resources in.

2. If confirmed, will you work to prioritize the modernization of NASA's King Air aircraft?

   Answer: I am not familiar with the specific modernization request for the King Air aircraft, but if confirmed, I would like to conduct a holistic assessment of the NASA fleet to ensure it is modernized and fully capable of supporting the agency's transportation, research, and inspirational missions. This could include expanding the fleet with both new and existing civil and military aircraft.

3. Before sending humans to Mars, we need to solve the problem of landing vehicles safely on an unprepared surface. What can we start doing now to use affordable robotic missions to explore potential landing sites and to get high resolution images and data that NASA and its commercial partners can use to pick the best landing sites and land safely?

   Answer: With considerable focus on achieving NASA's near-term lunar objectives, including returning American astronauts and establishing an enduring presence, it would also be prudent to evaluate affordable robotic missions to Mars in parallel to increase our rate of learning ahead of future crewed missions.

4. What plans do you have to maximize use and modernize these resources across the entire civil, commercial, and national security enterprise?

   Answer: While NASA pursues the peaceful exploration and discovery in air and space, these domains are also vitally important to national security. If confirmed, I would work with counterparts across OSTP, DoW, DOE, DOT, and other agencies to avoid needless duplication or bespoke programs where synergy is possible. This would help ensure the smooth flow of information, timely decision-making, responsible resource allocation, and faster results.

SENATOR DAN SULLIVAN (R-AK)

1. The Geophysical Institute at the University of Alaska Fairbanks hosts unique, nationally critical assets, including the Poker Flat Research Range and a collection of polar-orbiting satellite downlink antennas, which support national security, military readiness, and space weather research.

    - If confirmed, can you commit to visiting Alaska, and specifically the University of Alaska Fairbanks, early in your tenure to see firsthand the strategic importance of this high-latitude research infrastructure?

    Answer: If confirmed, I would be happy to make that commitment and, if possible, also tour the Pacific Spaceport Complex.

2. The proposed FY26 budget includes reductions to the Science Mission Directorate (SMD) and the elimination of the Office of STEM Engagement (OSTEM), programs which are critical to Arctic science and Alaska's aerospace workforce pipeline. Additionally, the NASA Research Opportunities in Space and Earth Sciences (ROSES) program is foundational to U.S. excellence in scientific discovery and national security.

    - If confirmed, will you work to ensure that SMD and OSTEM are adequately funded in the President's budget request to support the fundamental science and workforce development needed to ensure United States space superiority?

    Answer: If confirmed, I can commit to being an advocate for science and a strong American workforce and will do all I can to maximize the scientific value of every dollar provided by Congress.

3. Alaska Satellite Facility (ASF) serves as NASA's Distributed Active Archive Center (DAAC) for strategically important synthetic aperture radar (SAR) data. It is my understanding that NASA is considering DAAC consolidation that could shift responsibilities to Washington, D.C., potentially undermining mission effectiveness and harming critical Arctic operations.

    - If confirmed, can you commit to evaluating any proposed DAAC reorganization and flagging any potential impacts to the Alaska Satellite Facility with my office before a final decision is made?

    Answer: I am not familiar with any plans to consolidate or reorganize the DAAC, but would commit to working with your office and Congress on any potential implications.

4. The Pacific Spaceport Complex on Kodiak Island is the only high-latitude, polar-capable spaceport in the United States. It's state-owned, strategically located, and has already supported both government and commercial launches. With rising demand for orbital

launch, facilities like Kodiak could become even more important – not just for commercial growth, but for national security.

- What role do you see commercial spaceports like the Pacific Spaceport Complex Alaska playing in the future access to space?

Answer: The nation already lacks sufficient complexes to meet anticipated commercial and national security launch requirements--and I see existing facilities like the Pacific Spaceport Complex as a logical path to help meet that demand.

SENATOR TED BUDD (R-NC)

1. Since 1998 the NASA Michoud Assembly Facility (MAF) has been home to the National Center for Advanced Manufacturing, and more than $62 million has been invested in equipment, facilities, and people to ensure this is a nationally relevant capability.

With the retirement of the Space Shuttle, NASA moved to a multi-tenant model, enabling commercial partners to leverage this asset. Unfortunately, in recent years it has become more difficult for external partners to leverage the facility's unique capabilities.

Do you support allowing commercial companies to leverage the MAF and allowing that facility to become a key part of the rebuilding of America's industrial base? Do you see such a model being an example for other capabilities across NASA facilities?

> *Answer:* I believe NASA must constantly evaluate how to maximize its unique facilities and test infrastructure to best support the mission of the agency, commercial partners, and the broader industrial base. Several NASA centers have already taken positive steps in this direction, and it should remain an area of focus going forward.

SENATOR ERIC SCHMITT (R-MO)

1. Mr. Isaacman, China has used radioisotope power systems to survive the lunar night since 2019, giving it the only continuous presence on the Moon, and it plans to launch more missions using this technology in 2028. U.S. landers, by contrast, are limited to 14 days because they cannot operate through the lunar night. While NASA has announced plans for a fission reactor by 2030, that system does not address the immediate need for continuous power on lander missions this decade. Can you speak to what you see as the future of nuclear power in space and the need to have this technology incorporated into future NASA missions?

   Answer: I am very passionate about NASA continuously recalibrating to focus on the near-impossible — the things no other agency or organization is capable of accomplishing. In that regard, it is imperative that NASA dramatically expand and accelerate investments in nuclear programs, including propulsion and surface-power systems. This should include high- and low-power reactors on timelines much faster than 2030, in addition to more traditional RTGs.

2. Mr. Isaacman, NASA has a wide portfolio of space science programs, ranging from satellites and rovers to sounding rockets and balloons. Programs like NASA's high-altitude balloon missions provide a unique, cost-effective platform for testing instruments, conducting research, and training the next generation of scientists. Institutions such as Washington University in St. Louis, through the McDonnell Center for the Space Sciences, depend on these suborbital programs to develop and flight-test cutting-edge instruments and to train students and early-career researchers in hands-on space science and instrumentation. Could you explain why it is important for NASA to maintain a diversity of mechanisms, including balloon programs, sounding rockets, and other suborbital platforms, for advancing space science, and how these complement larger satellite and deep-space missions?

   Answer: Orbital and deep space missions are costly and carry far more risk than various suborbital alternatives. To the greatest extent possible, NASA should look to suborbital platforms to capture relevant science and test data that can derisk or supplement expensive orbital missions. I also more than acknowledge and value the associated STEM benefits of these suborbital programs working alongside academic institutions.

3. Mr. Isaacman, in 2028, China plans to fly International partners' payloads to Mars on their Mars Sample Return mission, Tianwen-3. China has made up to 15 kilograms of mass available for international collaboration projects on the mission's Earth return orbiter (ERO) spacecraft and a further 5 kg on the Mars orbiter (MO). United States commercial providers have over 1000 kg of additional payload capacity available to fly international partners' payloads to Mars on a 2028 mission. How is NASA and the Science Mission Directorate working to ensure our international partners fly their Martian payloads on American spacecraft, built and flown from American soil, rather than on Chinese spacecraft, built and flown from China?

Answer: As mentioned in my opening remarks, NASA is faced with a great competitor moving at impressive speed. Competition can be a good thing, but this is not a race we can afford to lose. It is imperative that NASA:

- **Clear obstacles and bureaucracy** that impede progress and give our competitor room to move faster, while also making it easier for commercial and international partners to work with the agency.
- **Intense mission focus -including the contributions of our international and commercial partners – this includes:** American leadership in the high ground of space, the return of American astronauts to the Moon and establishment of an enduring presence, investment in next "giant leap" capabilities such as nuclear propulsion and surface power, and accelerated Mars exploration. We must also establish the orbital economy to fund the future we all want to see in space and evolve NASA into a force-multiplier for science to increase the rate of world-changing discoveries.