

Questions for the Record

U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

“Nomination of Dr. Richard Spinrad to be Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere of the Department of Commerce (NOAA Administrator), Col. Pamela Melroy to be Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and Carlos Monje to be Under Secretary for Policy of the Department of Transportation”

May 20, 2021

Question for the Record from Senator Tester to Col. Pamela Melroy

US Governance of Commercial Space. NASA’s partnerships with our commercial space industry has brought new and cheaper capabilities to NASA, and allows NASA to focus on the “hard problems.” The current commercial space operating environment, however, is fragmented. The FAA is responsible for launch while the DOD (and soon DoC) are responsible for on orbit operations.

Question. Given your extensive experience with the US commercial space industry, in your estimation, how can the government better organize to help the industry set operating norms and standards so that the US continues to be a world leader in commercial space activities?

Answer.

As you note, many federal agencies have operations in space or regulatory responsibilities for commercial space operations. Clear roles and responsibilities for these agencies, including which agencies should regulate in-space activities would help provide certainty to all operators in space. For example, NASA provides expertise to help develop standards and best practices for on-orbit operations that can be used by other government agencies, other nations, or non-government operators in space. The National Space Council (NSpC) can and should play a crucial role in orchestrating roles and responsibilities among departments and agencies. The Biden-Harris Administration’s renewal of the NSpC is a positive step and bodes well for an all-of-government approach to these issues.