Reopening the American Frontier: Promoting Partnerships Between Commercial Space and the U.S. Government to Advance Exploration and Settlement

Ranking Member Bill Nelson Opening Statement

In 2010, Kay Bailey Hutchison and I joined together to set NASA’s human space flight program on its current “dual path” – where we are working to build private sector capabilities in Earth orbit and a government-led program for deep space and ultimately Mars.

That dual path approach is now bearing fruit. We’ve recaptured a significant portion of the global commercial launch market and we’re seeing launch prices coming down for NASA and for the Department of Defense. We are building the rocket and capsule that will take us deeper into space than we’ve ever been before. And we are seeing a dramatic transformation of the Kennedy Space Center where all of this is taking shape.

It has been my great pleasure to work with Mr. Bob Cabana, and with other leaders in government and industry, to bring this transformation about, and the exciting thing is we’re just getting started.

At Kennedy Space Center, the beating heart of Florida’s Space Coast, Bob leads one of the most dedicated and talented workforces in the country. It is a workforce that poured their hearts and souls into the Space Shuttle and Space Station. It is a workforce that is now building new vehicles like Dragon, Starliner, and Orion, and who are transforming the Kennedy Space Center and the whole area around Cape Canaveral for the next era of civil and commercial space missions.

One of the most visible and exciting examples of the transformation at the Cape is at Pad A, where SpaceX, under a public-private partnership, has taken responsibility for a historic launch complex that NASA was not using and could not afford to maintain. SpaceX is using that launch complex to get supplies to the International Space Station, to launch national security missions, and to perform commercial launches that just a few years ago would have gone to Russian or European companies. Next year, they will be launching crew to the International Space Station.

Just down the beach from Pad A, United Launch Alliance will also be launching crew to ISS in Boeing’s Starliner Capsule.
And soon they’re going to have even more company. In 2015, Bob and I worked together to help close the deal between NASA, the Air Force, Space Florida, and Blue Origin for development of Blue Origin’s new orbital launch site at the Kennedy Space Center. Today, the company is nearing the completion of its more than 630,000-square foot manufacturing facility at Kennedy Space Center's Exploration Park where Blue Origin will build its New Glenn rockets.

All of this activity is complementing ongoing work like the assembly of Orion, which was made possible by a public-private partnership with Lockheed Martin to renovate the Neil Armstrong Operations and Checkout Facility.

So, as I said, we are just getting started, and I am going to continue to work with Bob and his counterpart at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, General Monteith, to ensure that we continue to improve operating conditions and capabilities for commercial users of the range, and look at ways to make the spaceport more competitive for new commercial spaceflight activities. As a matter of fact, I’m happy to report that in this year’s defense authorization, I inserted provisions to help improve the launch infrastructure at the range and to accelerate the Air Force’s adoption of reusable launch vehicles like the Falcon 9.

And, Mr. Ellis, I would add we certainly have a spot for launching your company’s rockets at the Cape as well. I’d love for Relativity Space to come be a part of the community that folks are beginning to call the Silicon Valley of the Space Business.

So, I want to thank the witnesses for coming today and thank you, Senator Cruz, for calling this hearing on this very important and timely topic.

**Return to Hearing**