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ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
2125 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6115
Majority (202) 225-3641
Minority (202) 225-2927

April 19, 2026

MEMORANDUM

To: Members, Energy and Commerce Committee
From: Majority Staff
Re: Communications and Technology Subcommittee Hearing

I. INTRODUCTION

On Tuesday, April 21, 2026, at 2:00 PM, the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology will hold a hearing in 2123 Rayburn House Office Building entitled, "SAT Streamlining Act: Modernizing Satellite Licensing for the Final Frontier." The following witnesses are expected to testify:

II. WITNESSES

- Tom Stroup, President, Satellite Industry Association
- Kara Leibin Azocar, Vice President of Regulatory & Public Policy, Iridium Communications Inc.
- Shiva Goel, Partner, Wiley Rein LLP

III. BACKGROUND

Closing the digital divide and encouraging innovation in communications technologies has been a longstanding priority for the Committee. Communications services provided by satellite operators are an important component of the marketplace. Satellite operators provide broadband service to homes and businesses as well as mission critical services like highly reliable voice, video, data, and observation capabilities to critical infrastructure companies and the Federal government. The satellite industry has been in a period of robust growth and innovation over the last decade, including the deployment of new low-earth orbit satellite constellations providing communications services. In recent years, there has been increased interest in using satellite technologies and wireless spectrum to provide or support mobile

services from space in addition to terrestrial infrastructure. In January 2023, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted unanimously to establish the Space Bureau.[1]

IV. SELECTED ISSUES

A. Satellite Communications Licensing

The FCC has jurisdiction over and authority to regulate "all interstate and foreign communication by wire or radio and all interstate and foreign transmission of energy by radio, which originates and/or is received within the United States […] and to the licensing and regulating of all radio stations as hereinafter provided."[2] The FCC is also responsible for authorizing the use of electromagnetic spectrum (spectrum) in the United States, and has authority to "[m]ake such rules and regulations and prescribe such restrictions and conditions, not inconsistent with law, as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of [the Act]."[3] The FCC has relied on this authority to regulate the transmission and reception of satellite communications for decades, and it therefore plays an important role in advancing the availability of satellite-provided communications services.[4]

The FCC licensed the first private telecommunications satellite in 1973,[5] responding to a request by the American Broadcasting Company in 1965 for permission to operate a satellite for the purpose of distributing television programming to affiliate stations.[6] In 1970, the FCC issued a policy statement to enhance flexibility for licensees to provide a range of satellite services without unnecessary regulatory barriers, which helped pave the way for the development of a domestic communications satellite industry.[7] During the 1980s, the FCC granted an additional four groups of domestic Fixed Satellite Service (FSS) authorizations, including those in geosynchronous orbit (GSO),[8] and in the 1990s, the FCC allocated spectrum and issued service rules for additional satellite services in low-earth orbit (LEO): the Little LEO and Big LEO services.[9]

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[1] See News Release, FCC, FCC Space Bureau & Office of International Affairs Launches April 11 (Apr. 7, 2023), https://www fcc.gov/document/fcc-space-bureau-office-international-affairs-launches-april-11.
[2] Communications Act of 1934 § 2 at 47 U.S.C. 152.
[3] 47 U.S.C. 303(r).
[4] Communications Act of 1934 §§ 2; 303 at 47 U.S.C. 152; 47 U.S.C. 303(r).
[5] Western Union Telegraph Co., 38 F.C.C.2d 1197 (1973).
[6] *See*, *Establishment of Domestic Communication-Satellite Facilities by Nongovernmental Entities,* Report and Order, 22 F.C.C.2d 86, app. B, at 108 (1970).
[7] *See*, *Establishment of Domestic Communications-Satellite Facilities by Non-Governmental Entities,* First Report and Order, 22 FCC 2d 86 (1970), Second Report and Order, 35 FCC 2d 844 (1972), recon., Memorandum Opinion and Order, 38 FCC 2d 665 (1972).
[8] *See*, 1980 Orbit Assignment Order, 84 FCC 2d at 584; Assignment of Orbital Locations to Space Stations in the Domestic Fixed-Satellite Service, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 94 FCC 2d 129 (1983), recon. FCC 84-32 (Feb. 2, 1984), further recon. (May 15, 1984); Assignment of Orbital Locations to Space Stations in the Domestic Fixed-Satellite Service, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 50 Fed. Reg. 35228 (1985) (1985 Orbit Assignment Order), recon. denied, FCC 86-376 (rel. Aug. 26, 1986); Assignment of Orbital Locations to Space Stations in the Domestic Fixed-Satellite Service, Memorandum Opinion and Order, 3 FCC Rcd 6972 (1988) (1988 Orbit Assignment Order).
[9] *See*, *Amendment of Section 2.106 of the Commission's Rules to Allocate Spectrum to the Fixed-Satellite Service and the Mobile-Satellite Service for Low-Earth Orbit Satellites,* Report and Order, 8 FCC Rcd 1812 (1993);

In 2016, the FCC opened a processing round for non-geostationary orbit (NGSO) FSS systems, where 10 applicants were determined to be acceptable for filing.[10] In 2020, the FCC opened a second processing round for NGSO FSS systems, and the FCC has received 8 applications or petitions.[11] In April 2023, the FCC adopted new rules governing satellite system spectrum sharing. These new guidelines helped provide certainty for satellite operators that are sharing spectrum but were licensed in different processing rounds. Specifically, systems approved earlier receive primary spectrum access, and newer entrants were provided certainty needed to participate in such a cooperative spectrum sharing structure.[12] The FCC also included reforms to speed up processing of applications.

Building on this progress, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr announced last year a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) aimed at overhauling licensing regimes for satellite systems. If adopted, this rulemaking would overhaul the licensing rules for space and earth stations to improve the predictability and speed of the licensing process by implementing an "assembly line" framework.[13] Additionally, the Commission is soliciting comments through an NPRM on ways to make more intensive and flexible use of spectrum bands above 24 GHz that are shared between the terrestrial Upper Microwave Flexible Use Service (UMFUS) and the FSS.[14]

B. Satellite to Cellar Communications

There has been increased interest in using satellite technologies to provide mobile services, or support mobile services, from space in addition to terrestrial infrastructure.[15] Supplemental coverage from space can be used to provide coverage in remote and unserved areas and can also be lifesaving when terrestrial-based infrastructure fails during emergencies like natural disasters. Multiple partnerships have been announced between satellite operators and

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Amendment of the Commission's Rules to Establish Rules and Policies Pertaining to a Non-Voice, Non-Geostationary Mobile-Satellite Service, Report and Order, 8 FCC Rcd 8450 (1993); and *see*, Amendment of Section 2.106 of the Commission's Rules to Allocate the 1610-1626.5 MHz and the 2483.5-2500 MHz Bands for Use by the Mobile-Satellite Service, Including Non-geostationary Satellites, Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 536 (1994); Amendment of the Commission's Rules to Establish Rules and Policies Pertaining to a Mobile Satellite Service in the 1610-1626.5/2483.5-2500 MHz Frequency Bands, Report and Order, 9 FCC Rcd 5936 (1994), on recon., 11 FCC Rcd 12861 (1996).

[10] *See*, *Applications Accepted for Filing, Cut-Off Established for Additional NGSO-Like Satellite Applications or Petitions for Operations in the 12.75-13.25 GHz, 13.85-14 GHz, 18.6-18.8 Ghz, 19.3-20.2 GHz, and 29.1-29.5 GHz Bands,* Public Notice, Federal Communications Commission (released May 26, 2017), https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-17-524A1.pdf.

[11] *See*, *In the Matter of Application for Authority to Deploy and Operate a Ka-Band Non-Geostationary Satellite Orbit System,* Order and Authorization, Federal Communications Commission (adopted Jul. 29, 2020).

[12] *See,* News Release, FCC, FCC Adopts New Rules for Satellite System Spectrum Sharing (Apr. 20, 2023), https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-392726A1.pdf.

[13] *In the Matter of Space Modernization for the 21st Century*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Federal Communications Commission (adopted Oct. 28, 2025), https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-69A1.pdf.

[14] *In the Matter of Facilitating More Intensive Use of Upper Microwave Spectrum*, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Federal Communications Commission (adopted October 28, 2025), https://docs fcc.gov/public/attachments/FCC-25-70A1_Rcd.pdf.

[15] *See*, *e.g.*, Michael Sheetz, *The major space players and diverging strategies in the race to connect your smartphone via satellites*, CNBC (Oct. 23, 2022), https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/23/space-race-to-connect-satellites-to-phones-with-apple-spacex-att html.

wireless carriers to integrate non-terrestrial networks and terrestrial networks to eliminate coverage gaps.[16] Private-sector standards bodies are also paving the way for continued integration of satellite services and terrestrial 5G and 6G networks.[17] In March 2024, the FCC voted to create a spectrum framework for supplemental coverage from space. This framework was intended to facilitate partnerships between satellite operators and wireless carriers to allow satellite operators to lease spectrum bands from mobile carriers to provide service outside of the carrier's coverage area.[18] The FCC approved the first authorization for supplemental coverage from space in November 2024.[19]

C. Mega Constellations and Orbital Data Centers

In March 2026, the FCC's Space Bureau announced that it had accepted two applications for filing and comment on Orbital Data Centers. One application, filed by SpaceX, proposes a new NGSO system that would feature up to one million satellites.[20] Another application submitted by Starcloud plans to launch and operate as many as 88,000 satellites.[21]

D. Competition

Satellite communications services are an inherently global enterprise. While the FCC is responsible for authorizing the use of electromagnetic spectrum in the United States,[22] satellite operators provide services in markets around the world, so international harmonization of satellite spectrum use is critical. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) manages a global table of spectrum allocations. This table represents treaty-level agreements in which countries have agreed to defined uses for certain spectrum frequencies in different regions across the world. National regulators, like the FCC in the United States, must update their regulations in accordance with the wireless regulations of the ITU. Additionally, the ITU plays an important role in managing orbital slots for GSO and NGSO systems. The location of satellites in orbit is an important component of determining the spectrum usage of each satellite and therefore are considered in deliberations at the ITU and the FCC when licensing satellite communications systems.

The European Union in July 2025 proposed the European Union Space Act, which would create a new regulatory framework for satellite operators seeking to operate in the EU. It would

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[16] *See*, Mike Dano, *How, and when, you might connect your smartphone to a satellite*, LIGHTREADING (Sept. 1, 2022), https://www.lightreading.com/satellite/how-and-when-you-might-connect-your-smartphone-to-satellite/d/d-id/780114.
[17] *See*, *5G & Non-terrestrial Networks*, 5G AMERICAS (Feb. 2022), https://www.5gamericas.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/5G-Non-Terrestrial-Networks-2022-WP-Id.pdf.
[18] *See*, News Release, FCC, FCC Advances Supplemental Coverage from Space Framework, (Mar. 14, 2024), https://docs.fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-401208A1.pdf.
[19] *See*, Order and Authorization, FCC, (adopted November 26, 2024), https://docs fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-24-1193A1.pdf.
[20] *See*, News Release, FCC, Space Bureau Accepts For Filing SpaceX's Application for Orbital Data Centers (Feb. 4, 2026), https://docs fcc.gov/public/attachments/DA-26-113A1.pdf.
[21] Satellite Licensing Division and Satellite Programs and Policy Division Information – SAT – Accepted for Filing, Public Notice, Report No: SAT-01982 (rel. Mar. 13, 2026), https://docs fcc.gov/public/attachments/DOC-419509A1.pdf.
[22] Communications Act of 1934 §2; 303 at 47 U.S.C. 152; 47 U.S.C. 303(r).

replace the member-state patchwork that currently exists. It would also impose new space safety and environmental requirements on companies, such as rules governing space debris.[23] The Commerce Department has outlined several concerns with this proposal.[24]

Meanwhile, the People's Republican of China (PRC) has pushed an aggressive, state-led expansion of its satellite industry to compete with the U.S. and European industries. The PRC has submitted two filings at the ITU to deploy mega-constellations of satellites.[25]

V. LEGISLATION

On Tuesday, the Subcommittee on Communications and Technology will review the following legislation:

- **H.R. 8255, the Satellite and Telecommunications (SAT) Streamlining Act (Reps. Guthrie and Pallone)**

The legislation is led by Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Brett Guthrie (R-KY) and Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ). The bill would amend the Communications Act of 1934 to add a new section providing authority for the FCC to grant licenses for GSO and NGSO satellite services, approve grants of market access for foreign-licensed GSO and NGSO satellite services, and provide authorization for Earth stations (including gateway stations).

Subject to certain exceptions, the discussion draft requires the FCC to grant or deny a request for a new application for a license, a major modification to a license, a new gateway Earth station, or a receive-only earth station within one year. The bill would also provide authority for the FCC to grant modifications to, and renewals of, a license or grant of market access granted under this authority.

VI. KEY QUESTIONS

- What challenges exist in the FCC's regulatory process for licensing commercial satellite communications services and how can that process be improved?
- How can Congress encourage innovation, competition, and U.S. leadership in the commercial satellite communications marketplace?
- What challenges exist in receiving FCC authorization to deploy satellite to cellular services?
- What challenges exist in receiving FCC and NTIA authorization for the use of spectrum to launch satellite communications services?

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[23] Alden Abbott, *U.S. And EU Clash On Promoting Space Commerce And Innovation,* FORBES (Aug. 27, 2025), https://www forbes.com/sites/aldenabbott/2025/08/27/us-and-eu-clash-on-promoting-space-commerce-and-innovation/.
[24] OFFICE OF SPACE COMM., U.S. Gov't Provides Feedback on Draft E.U. SpaceAct (Nov. 20, 2025), https://space.commerce.gov/u-s-government-provides-feedback-on-draft-e-u-space-act/.
[25] Andrew Jones, *China Files ITU Paperwork for Megaconstellations Totaling Nearly 200,000 Satellites*, SPACENEWS (Jan. 12, 2026).

VII. STAFF CONTACTS

If you have any questions regarding this hearing, please contact Michael Essington or Elaina Murphy of the Committee Staff at (202) 225-3641.