

COMPETITION, COOPERATION, AND THE NEW SPACE AGE*

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Congratulations to Silicon Flatirons and Colorado Law School on your inaugural Space and Spectrum Policy Conference. It is great to be amongst industry leaders, and I look forward to learning from all of you as we launch into important conversations about the role of regulation and international cooperation in the new space age.

Space has been a frontier of technological and communications innovation for quite some time. It used to be that only the most adventurous would dare to seek their place amongst the literal stars. There is a reason why our cultural point of reference for something being easy is to compare it to something incredibly difficult to do—rocket science.

But we have come a long way from Telstar. An industry report estimates that since 1957, entities from 102 countries have deployed at least one satellite, and that today U.S. entities operate over 8,000 satellites.¹

In recent years, barriers to entering the world of space exploration have lowered, creating new opportunities for

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** Commissioner Gomez was sworn in as FCC Commissioner in September 2023, bringing over thirty years of experience in domestic and international communications law and policy to her position. She previously led U.S. preparations for the ITU World Radiocommunication Conference 2023 for the Department of State and served as Deputy Administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration from 2009 to 2013, where she oversaw the transition to digital television and the establishment of a broadband network for first responders. Commissioner Gomez also served as Deputy Chief of the International Bureau and as a Senior Legal Advisor to then-Chairman William E. Kennard, and has served as Counsel to the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee and as Deputy Chief of Staff of the National Economic Council. Prior to joining the State Department, she worked in private practice focusing on telecommunications law. Commissioner Gomez holds a B.A. from Pennsylvania State University and a J.D. from George Washington University Law School.

1. SATELLITE INDUS. ASS'N, STATE OF THE SATELLITE INDUSTRY REPORT (2025), <https://sia.org/news-resources/state-of-the-satellite-industry-report/> [<https://perma.cc/7VRK-CTKM>].

innovation. Over 11,000 small satellites were deployed between 2022 and 2024, and today there are 618 GEO and over 10,000 NGSO active satellites.² The global satellite industry revenue for 2024 is estimated to have reached a striking 293 billion dollars.³ In other words, it is a great time to host a conversation about space policy.

The FCC's role in space policy is to authorize commercial systems, facilitate efficient spectrum use, ensure responsible practices for orbital debris, and coordinate with international fora. In practical terms, this means the FCC licenses space stations and earth stations; ensures that operators have Orbital Debris Mitigation Plans; engages in the payload review process with corresponding federal sister agencies; and issues experimental operating authority licenses that facilitate continued space innovation.

Our regulatory authority focuses on the activities of space companies operating domestically within our geographical boundaries. But authorizations in the space sector also take us beyond our boundaries. Space, by its very nature, is inherently international, and thus policy for space communications is inextricably tied to successful cooperation with international bodies and other nations. In that regard, the FCC is a critical player in engaging with international bodies to further U.S. leadership and in helping domestic operators fulfill the international satellite coordination process pursuant to International Telecommunication Union (ITU) requirements governing the use of radio-frequency spectrum. To put it succinctly, our role in space communications and innovation is both domestic and global.

As a Commissioner, I am focused on supporting American innovation and leadership, and I deeply understand the importance of strong relationships and good-faith cooperation to maintaining our success globally.

I recently went on a brief space tour to learn more about the companies leading the new space age from right here in the United States. I had the opportunity to visit established and emerging companies in Los Angeles and San Francisco, as well as institutions that are part of the growing space economy. My goal with these visits was simply to learn. Learn how these innovators are contributing to the field and discuss ways the FCC can better promote competition in the space economy.

I visited satellite manufacturers and operators in California, including Astranis, Rocket Lab, K2 Space, and Planet—a mix of

2. *Id.*

3. *Id.*

established and new entrants manufacturing satellites, each with its own unique signature. These companies are making their own mark in a segment of the space economy, and they exemplify the new era of commercial space. Planet, for example, images the entire earth every day using its own satellites and makes that data available to a wide range of clients.⁴ This type of imaging was previously accessible only to certain governments. In a world revolutionized by small satellites and more accessible launches capable of carrying larger payloads farther into space, K2 Space is going back to basics. It differentiates itself by building large, powerful satellites designed for high throughput.⁵

With an ever-increasing demand to put more communications infrastructure in space, we all understand that the need for more access to launch capacity has never been more important. So, I was glad to have the opportunity to visit Rocket Lab's facilities and see firsthand their innovative rockets.⁶ I also had the chance to visit Apple and learn about its partnership with Globalstar to provide emergency satellite connectivity.⁷

And no space tour is complete without visiting some of the most famous scientists on the planet—NASA. At NASA's Ames Research Center, I learned about exciting new missions, including those involving solar sails and spacecraft swarms conducted by the Small Spacecraft Technology program, which tests the capabilities of small spacecraft for exploration, science, and the commercial space sector.⁸ Solar sails use the pressure of sunlight for propulsion, much like a sailboat is powered by wind through its sails, eliminating the need for rocket propellant.⁹ Swarms, meanwhile, test the ability of small spacecraft technologies to fly cooperatively as a small group to enable multipoint science data collection.¹⁰

Visiting these companies and learning about ongoing federal research made me even more excited for American innovation and

4. PLANET LABS PBC, <https://www.planet.com/> [https://perma.cc/C68B-XMUZ].

5. K2 SPACE, <https://www.k2space.com/about> [https://perma.cc/Z2LZ-V2CR].

6. ROCKET LAB, <https://rocketlabcorp.com/about/about-us/> [https://perma.cc/R2BA-A3PR].

7. Press Release, *Emergency SOS via satellite on iPhone 14 and iPhone 14 Pro lineups made possible by \$450 million Apple investment in US infrastructure*, APPLE (Nov. 10, 2022), <https://www.apple.com/newsroom/2022/11/emergency-sos-via-satellite-made-possible-by-450m-apple-investment/> [https://perma.cc/NM6V-A297]. This partnership was in place at the time of the remarks.

8. NASA, *About Ames*, <https://www.nasa.gov/ames/> [https://perma.cc/9Y5P-SRWH]; NASA, *About Small Spacecraft & Distributed Systems*, https://www.nasa.gov/smallspacecraft/smallsat_overview/ [https://perma.cc/YN7H-NDM7].

9. NASA, *Using Sunlight to Power Deep Space Exploration*, <https://www.nasa.gov/smallspacecraft/what-is-ac3/> [https://perma.cc/RXK5-43CF].

10. NASA, *What is Starling?*, <https://www.nasa.gov/smallspacecraft/what-is-starling/> [https://perma.cc/KG2R-JRKQ].

global leadership in space. Meeting these space innovators also highlighted the critical importance of competition in spectrum management and the space sector overall. Space is an exciting frontier of discovery and innovation.

Explosive growth in this sector, domestically and internationally, has created new opportunities for entrepreneurs and visionaries, but it has also raised new questions for regulators like the FCC—particularly around how to strike the right balance for responsible space use in ways that foster competition and innovation. As our country increasingly relies on space-based connectivity to eliminate mobile dead zones, enhance national security capabilities, and lead space communications globally, we must ensure that a robust and competitive ecosystem exists that expands consumer choice, lowers costs, and drives further innovation.

Sustaining space competition and leadership requires multiple healthy competitors, and our policy decisions cannot lose sight of that. In recent months, I voted on items that explore the possibility of making more spectrum available for space communications—items that examine the potential benefits of opening new bands for space communications use while also inviting the public to comment on the potential challenges involved.

Some of the bands under consideration in these items were already under study, while others were newly considered at the request of industry leaders. Asking questions early in spectrum management is critical. By identifying potential incompatibilities and hurdles at the outset, we walk a data-driven path toward consensus for sharing this finite resource amongst competitors.

On the other hand, failure to ask those questions has caused problems in the past. Failure to coordinate obstructs our ability to identify potential problems and incompatibilities, which can ultimately cost the industry time and money. And failure to address critical differences can impede future collaboration, making it more difficult to reach consensus and develop effective long-term spectrum policy.

The very nature of space technology and spectrum use in space demands that we explore the tricky questions and cooperate in good faith. Satellite footprints are often large and may span more than one country, making frequency coordination especially important to avoid interference with other satellite and terrestrial networks. This is why cooperation is critical for sustainable space policy. We do not occupy or control space alone.

In the space sector, domestic decisions provide a global example. Practices that demonstrate interagency cooperation encourage cooperation globally. Policies that support competition at

home inspire competition abroad. From ensuring respect for orbital slots to managing access to high-frequency satellite bands equitably so that all countries and satellite operations can benefit, we demonstrate that cooperation and respect for competition starts at home.

Our domestic policy decisions about space are, in short, inextricably connected to international conversations. One only has to take a look at the agenda for the upcoming World Radiocommunication Conference in 2027 (WRC-27) to appreciate the new space era in which we find ourselves and the importance of astute diplomacy.¹¹ The majority of the thirty-one agenda items slated for discussion at the WRC-27 will involve space and satellites.¹² In broad strokes, the agenda indicates conversations will surround expanding spectrum access for satellite use, ensuring equitable access to satellite spectrum, protecting research and scientific services, and improving international procedures for allocating spectrum in a rational, efficient, and economical way.¹³

Space policy connects communications infrastructure beyond a nation's borders. Harnessing the strength of soft power and diplomacy is key to achieving success. This is where early domestic cooperation practices have the potential to fuel successful international cooperation. A well-coordinated cooperative approach domestically lays the groundwork for successful cooperation internationally. Showing up together makes an impact, and our unified presence on global stages like the WRC-27 is critical.

Fortunately, we can utilize international bodies and institutions to encourage harmonious cooperation for the benefit of all. International institutions like the ITU and the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS) are especially critical to facilitating collaboration, particularly in moments of disagreement.

Setting global policy for the use of space spectrum is an art. As policymakers, we champion U.S. leadership without losing sight of the interdependent nature of fruitful international cooperation for our success. Our role is to continue building relationships with regulators around the world to advance positions that support U.S. leadership and ingenuity.

I look forward to the opportunity to bring my expertise in domestic and international spectrum policy to our collective efforts

11. ITU WORLD RADIOCOMMUNICATION CONF. [WRC], Resolution 813, *Agenda for the 2027 World Radiocommunication Conference* (WRC-23), https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-r/oth/0c/0a/R0C0A0000110038PDFE.pdf [<https://perma.cc/DK8D-CLMK>].

12. *Id.*

13. *Id.* at Agenda Items 1.6, 1.15, 7.

to support the continued, sustainable use of the space spectrum—efforts that must keep competition and cooperation at their center.