

Opening Statement
The Honorable Pete Olson, Ranking Republican Member
Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics
Hearing on *Keeping the Space Environment Safe for Civil and Commercial Users*

April 28, 2009

Madame Chairwoman, thank you for calling this morning's hearing, which I believe is the first time this subcommittee has explored this issue, and my thanks too, to our witnesses for taking time out of their busy schedules to appear before us today. I know that you have invested many hours in preparation for today's hearing, and I am grateful for all of your efforts.

Satellite collisions and the dangers posed by space debris have captured the public's and industry's attention. If anything, the Iridium/Cosmos collision should serve as a stark signal that space-faring nations can no longer be complacent about the threats posed to all who use space. Congress and the Administration must also take note as we endeavor to establish future policies and programs that rely on routine access and use of space. There are many issues I look forward to hearing about today and to ask questions about our path forward.

As more countries join the ranks of space-faring nations, all of us must determine ways to prevent future collisions, mitigate the threat of debris, how best to track debris, how to minimize debris generation during future launches, and to better understand the economic and operational effects that space debris imposes on civil, commercial and military users.

Once again, this committee is addressing an issue that has moved from the realm of science fiction to one of science fact: Can we track a bolt that came off a long dead satellite moving at thousands of miles an hour from colliding with a still working spacecraft that is critical to our daily lives or to the lives of a crew inhabiting that spacecraft? The chances of this may not be as great as the chance of me getting into a fender bender on the Beltway, but the consequences are greater than ruining one rush hour.

No other nation is as heavily invested in space-based commerce, national security, environmental monitoring and research as the United States. Given the critical role that space plays in our daily lives, and one that is so critical to preserving our high standard of living, we simply must improve our ability to monitor and mitigate the threats posed by other satellites and space debris. I think it critical that we also convince other space-faring nations of the urgency to adopt similar strategies, especially as more and more satellites are lofted into crowded orbits.

To the unknowing, the term 'space traffic management' may sound a bit geeky and esoteric, but as I was preparing for this afternoon's hearing, I was quickly convinced that this term has real meaning and describes a discipline we all need to pay close attention to. I am aware that government-owned and operated satellites rely on intensive monitoring programs to avoid collisions with other satellites and debris, but as more and more satellites come into use, especially from commercial users, the challenge of maintaining safe separation will grow.

I want to thank our Chairwoman for convening this timely and important hearing, and to again thank our witnesses. I am anxious to hear your testimony and ask some questions about the way forward.