



The Space Force's moment of truth

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After two years, America stands at the cusp of Congress finally approving the creation of a Space Force. If it does, it will send a powerful and positive message that America intends to uphold a free international system and ensure freedom of access and navigation in space. If it fails to do so, the cost to the American economy and security will be substantial.

This is not a theoretical concern: there is a real threat that the bipartisan consensus for a separate military branch dedicated to space could collapse. Before the Thanksgiving break, House Democratic leaders considered removing the Space Force language from this year's National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). This might appear as mere partisan politics. But the proposed Space Force has enjoyed broad bipartisan support since it was first introduced over two years ago by then House Armed Services Committee leaders Chairman Rep Jim Cooper (D-TN) and Chairman Mike Rogers (R-AL).

Cooper and Rogers were among the first to see the classified intelligence and to conclude that burying space – a naturally separate domain -- deep within the U.S. Air Force no longer served U.S. national interests. That is why, both the current Senate and the House versions of the NDAA includes the creation of a U.S. Space Force within the Department of the Air Force.

Failure to adopt the Space Force sends a weak message to China at a time when we most need to project power and resolve. Second, it will have a devastating and compounding effect on jobs in key congressional districts. And third, it places America in a weak position to secure the emerging space economy when China seeks more land, resources and power outside its borders and even in space.

Over the last two decades we have seen the outsourcing of our manufacturing and industrial base to China. Are we content to see another loss like Huawei and 5G? We already are witnessing the icy hand of Chinese authoritarianism. Two U.S. entities -- the National Basketball Association and now Activision Blizzard Games - have been cowed from supporting human rights in Hong Kong due to fear of Chinese power. As we begin to expand human presence into space, are we surrendering our will to secure human rights?

A Space Force is the key to protecting the U.S. space economy and globally respected American norms and values. In 1775, our founders funded the creation of the Navy for a similar reason: to protect our nation, people and maritime-based economy. Today America accounts for nearly half of the space economy. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce predicts growth from \$385 billion to at least \$1.5 Trillion by 2040. That's an enormous scale of economic growth and jobs to surrender to China. If we fail to act quickly we will be rapidly eclipsed by China, which intends to establish an "earth-moon space economic zone" that would generate a whopping \$10 trillion a year by 2050.

The impact on jobs could be substantial. For example, within House Armed Service Committee Chairman Adam Smith's state of Washington are a number of key space companies: Blue Origin, SpaceX, Tethers Unlimited, Spacelift Industries, BlackSky, and EarthNow. In the Seattle-Tacoma area alone, aerospace companies employ over 105,560 engineers. Speaker Nancy Pelosi's California hosts over 100,000 aerospace employees and generates over 268,100 total jobs, and hosts companies like SpaceX, Northrop Grumman Innovation Systems, Lockheed Martin, and Relativity.

Within the Bay Area itself are Made-in-Space, NASA's Ames Research Center, and a conglomerate of Silicon Valley affiliated companies. How will they fare without the Space Force? A recent report State of the Space Industrial Base: Threats, Challenges and Actions outlined the threat these companies face by China's predatory pricing, investment in front companies, control of supply chains, and theft of intellectual property. Just this month, the US-China Economic and Security Commission, created by Congress, endorsed a Space Force to ensure "freedom of navigation and keeping lines of communication open, safe, and secure in the space domain, as the U.S. Navy does for U.S. interests in the maritime commons."

The Space Force is not just a stunt or a campaign promise. It will put us on a path to a better future. Space Force is a critical piece of our foreign policy, domestic innovation and growth. It is a key to a greener environment, energy security, and global freedom. Any decision to kill or punt on it gambles with the American modern way of life, our economy and our national security.

Now is the time make history and launch the U.S. Space Force.

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