

Details about the Space Frontier Act

Produced by the Alliance for Space Development

Question 1	What does “Allow commercial launch providers to move vehicles back to the experimental permit stage for testing purposes” mean?
Answer 1	<p>There are three flavors of how a launch gets regulated:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) There are amateur rules for smaller rockets.2) There is the experimental permit stage, which is intended for testing vehicles in development (and cannot take paying customers), and3) There are launch licenses, which can fly for actual paying customers. <p>When the law was written originally, the assumption was that vehicles would have no need to go back to being on the experimental permit stage once they were in operation (because they would be operational). However, launching under a launch license is a more restrictive process, and isn’t as conducive during testing and experiments for reusable launch vehicles. Additionally, getting an experimental permit again for a new vehicle, even if there is only a minor change to the vehicle, is exceptionally laborious. Therefore, there is a desire to have vehicles be able to move back and forth between the experimental permit stage and the launch license stage.</p>
Question 2	Why does the licensing process for remote sensing need to be streamlined?
Answer 2	<p>When the rules for remote sensing were created, they assumed that there would be a very slow launch cadence for new satellites, and relatively few new uses. This does not mesh well with today’s reality of new companies and new satellites coming online rapidly all the time. Therefore, they need to be updated, and made to match with the existing reality, and in particular to speed up the licensing process.</p>
Question 3	What sort of authorization is needed for NASA’s Commercial LEO program?
Answer 3	<p>While NASA can do new programs without Congress formally weighing in, it is very useful if Congress can formally endorse a program, to provide additional top cover for a program. Therefore, what this bill does is provide that top cover, by giving NASA formal authority to proceed with the Commercial LEO program. Note that authorization and appropriations are separate processes, so this bill is not concerned with the amount of money to be allowed for this purpose.</p>
Question 4	Why does the Office of Space Commerce (OSC) need to be elevated to a Bureau of Space Commerce?
Answer 4	<p>Currently, the OSC lives in and under NOAA. Going forward, there is both a need for a larger role for OSC, as well a bigger budget. For this to happen, the Office needs to be elevated to being a Bureau separate from NOAA. Logically the scope of space commerce is much broader than simply remote sensing, which is the domain of NOAA. Most importantly, since the OSC is not a Bureau, it does not have a line item in the budget. Because of this, it makes adding money to the OSC budget very difficult.</p>
Question 5	Was there a previous bill that addressed some of these issues?
Answer 5	<p>There was a version of this bill (also called the Space Frontier Act) introduced during the last congress. It passed the Senate by unanimous consent, and almost passed the House. The bill has been slightly modified to address concerns from the previous bill.</p>