SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

Nomination Hearing
Wednesday, April 9, 2025, at 10:15 A.M.

REPUBLICAN QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD

Mr. Jared Isaacman

COVER PAGE

CHAIRMAN TED CRUZ (R-TX)

1. Do you commit to providing NASA's initial reduction in force (RIF) plan, as submitted to OMB, to the Committee, if confirmed?

Answer:

To the extent it is permissible, yes. Like all federal departments and agencies, NASA operates within a government-wide framework and must adhere to OMB and White House guidance regarding RIF procedures.

2. Do you commit to providing all subsequent RIF plans to the Committee prior to executing them?

Answer:

To the extent it is permissible, yes. Like all federal departments and agencies, NASA operates within a government-wide framework and must adhere to OMB and White House guidance regarding RIF procedures.

3. In your testimony, you made several important points about the economics of space exploration. In particular, you emphasized the goal of a commercial low Earth orbit (LEO) economy and the need to understand the commercial potential of outer space beyond LEO. You promised that NASA would "ignite a thriving space economy in low Earth orbit," discussed your desire to maximize the remaining life of the International Space Station (ISS), and said you would "determine the economic…value" of the lunar surface as part of your approach to lunar exploration.

   Such economic analysis may prove challenging in part because NASA recently disbanded the Office of the Chief Economist at NASA headquarters, telling Committee staff that "there is no intention to maintain the function of the chief economist at the agency, and no plan to transfer those functions within other elements of the agency." Among other things, this office helped with cross-agency economic planning, conducted market assessments and economic analyses, and advised the Administrator on economic matters related to budget planning, program implementation and review, and procurement.

   a. Do you have a strategy for developing a robust space economy, particularly in LEO, where private investment, and not just NASA funding, sustains various space capabilities and activities? If so, please describe it.

Answer:

Yes, hopefully I have been clear and passionate in my testimony and responses that unlocking the true space economy is imperative. After 60 years of space exploration, we're still largely operating under a

government-funded model focused on launch, communications, and observation. It is not reasonable for taxpayers to perpetually fund the future we all envision for space.

If confirmed, my strategy starts with making the most of the ISS while it's deemed safe to operate. We need to prioritize science and research with real economic potential—particularly in biotech, pharmaceuticals, and advanced materials—to validate commercial use cases and give future LEO destinations the best possible chance of success. That is our best path to "crack the code" on the space economy.

Second, we need to remove the friction and bureaucracy that slows commercial progress. That means streamlining NASA's infrastructure access, rethinking how we engage with and 'do business' private industry, and ensuring our funding models don't just subsidize activity but instead catalyze scalable, sustainable outcomes.

b. If confirmed, do you intend to seek out any market assessments, economic analyses, or other financial or economic products to inform decision making at the agency? If yes, from where or whom will you obtain this information?

Answer:

If confirmed, I would absolutely seek out credible economic and market analyses to inform decision-making at NASA—especially as we work to ignite a true space economy and ensure a responsible return on taxpayer investments.

That said, I would also like to understand the current resources and internal capabilities within the agency. I'm aware that certain economic offices or roles were recently dissolved, and I'd want to review that rationale and determine whether that expertise should be restored or supplemented.

4. During your hearing, you criticized the speed of NASA's return to the lunar surface, citing the cost and schedule overruns. You said the President and many Americans are probably asking, "what's taking us so long to get back to the Moon and why does it cost so much money?" As you know, the Apollo program was primarily about putting man on the Moon, not maintaining a sustained human presence there. In contrast, the Artemis program is intended to create a "*sustained* human presence in cis-lunar space or on the Moon." (emphasis added) Similarly, the overarching Moon-to-Mars program is intended to ensure that the efforts and technologies of the Artemis program feed forward to manned missions to Mars. I am concerned about suggestions that the United States abandon the statutory requirement for NASA to maintain a material presence on or near the Moon. Congress was clear that the Artemis architecture is not to be retired or disbanded just because we have once again reached the Moon. Rather, Artemis and particularly Gateway are to serve as something akin to a forward operating base in space.

    a. In your own words, how do understand the term "sustained human presence" found in § 20302 of Chapter 51, United States Code?

Answer:

In my view, a "sustained human presence" means more than simply visiting or conducting one-off missions. It implies a continuous or regularly recurring physical presence that enables a broader strategic objective such as a scientific, economic or national security imperative.

b. Do you believe a sustained human presence at or on the Moon is necessary to maintain American leadership in space?

Answer:

As I stated during the hearing, I'm committed to following the law—and as a lifelong space enthusiast, I would like nothing more than to see lunar operations become continuous, enduring, and routine. That said, maintaining American leadership in space will require flexible policies that ensure clear scientific, economic, and strategic value for the American taxpayer and allow the agency, working with the Congress, to adapt to meet the ever changing geopolitical landscape.

5. During your hearing, several members of the Committee, including me, questioned you about whether NASA can meet its existing statutory obligations while simultaneously embarking on a new, dual-track mission to Mars under current budget levels. Do you believe that NASA—under current budget levels—can simultaneously have a continuous human presence in LEO through and beyond the life of the ISS as we transition to commercial LEO destinations (CLDs); establish a sustained human presence at the Moon; continue funding for other, existing complex science missions; and stand up a new manned mission to Mars?

Answer:

Historically, NASA managed multiple complex human spaceflight programs simultaneously—Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo—alongside numerous exploration missions like Ranger, Surveyor, Pioneer, in an era with far less technological capability than we possess today. More than six decades later, with the advances in industry and innovation, I believe the world's premier space agency should be capable of executing multiple major initiatives at a time.

I believe pursuing both lunar and Martian objectives is not inherently cost-prohibitive nor expressly prohibited by existing federal statute should such efforts not detract from the near-term objective of returning to the Moon first. There is meaningful hardware commonality across the existing Artemis Human Landing System (HLS) providers. For instance, both contractors are already required to validate reusable heavy-lift launch capabilities—technologies essential for transporting mass beyond low Earth orbit, whether toward the Moon or Mars. In fact, many of the technologies and capabilities NASA is already investing in—such as surface nuclear power systems, nuclear electric propulsion, and nuclear thermal propulsion—are highly relevant for Mars exploration, though they remain underfunded and subscale.

6. During the hearing, when asked by Senator Moran if you believe the current Artemis architecture, featuring the Space Launch System and Orion, is the best and fastest way to beat China to the Moon, you answered, "I don't think it's the long-term way [SLS and Orion] to get to and from the Moon, and to Mars, with great frequency, but this is the plan we have now…"

a. What do you envision as the long-term way to get to/from the Moon and Mars?

Answer:

As I stated during the hearing, SLS is the current plan and the fastest way to send American astronauts back to the Moon ahead of our geopolitical rivals. And this is a race we can't risk losing. But once our initial lunar objectives have been met, I believe NASA should transition from competing with industry and focus again on what no other agency or organization is capable of accomplishing.

The commercial launch market is more capable than ever, with numerous American providers investing in heavy-lift capabilities. NASA should take advantage of that competition and eventually refocus its world-class talent and infrastructure on what no one else is doing: developing the next generation of exploration technologies. That includes nuclear-powered spacecraft, which I believe represent the logical next step for long-duration, deep space missions beyond Mars.

b. What is the timeframe in which you believe NASA could begin executing the plan you describe?

Answer:

Human Landing System (HLS) contractors are already developing heavy-lift capabilities as part of the Artemis program. As those vehicles prove themselves by supporting Artemis lunar missions, they will be well-positioned to take on greater responsibility for sustainable, affordable transport to the Moon and Mars.

Beyond just the existing HLS contractors, there are additional commercial providers investing in similar heavy-lift capabilities. As commercial readiness increases, NASA will have the opportunity eventually to transition away from government-owned heavy-lift launch and shift its focus toward enabling technologies for deep space exploration.

7. There has been much speculation in the media about the administration's rumored desire to move NASA Headquarters out of Washington, DC, and to a NASA field center. Will you commit to notifying me or my committee staff of any NASA plans to move Headquarters outside of Washington, DC, well ahead of an official announcement?

Answer:

Yes.

8. NASA's Science Mission Directorate is responsible for the Mars Sample Return (MSR) mission and is managed by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). The Mars Sample Return will be crucial for helping plan a manned mission to Mars. The astromaterials receiving facility at the Johnson Space Center will be responsible for receiving, processing, and housing these samples—as they do with all astromaterials—once they have returned to Earth. However, NASA has halted progress on the program after cost and schedule ballooned well beyond expectations. You have said you believe in commercialization and

helping to spur the space economy. Currently, the commercial space company Rocket Lab has a proposal to manage MSR for less than half of the last estimate from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL). Do you commit to taking a hard look at whether MSR should be outsourced to industry, if confirmed?

Answer:

Yes.

9. When we met in my office, you talked about potentially centralizing mission control and space traffic management. Currently, the Johnson Space Center is home to Mission Control for all manned missions in space. What is your view on the future of mission control and space traffic management?

Answer:

NASA currently operates multiple "mission control" functions across the country, and while that's understandable given the agency's diverse mission portfolio, I don't believe every mission requires its own bespoke mission control center. This problem will only further be exacerbated as commercial industry matures and the space economy is finally uncovered.

If we truly envision a future with multiple space stations, regular lunar operations, Mars missions, and an expanding array of flagship science missions, then we need a more scalable, efficient, and centralized approach. This could include the consolidation of mission operations into a single, unified mission control architecture—a central command center that maintains real-time situational awareness across all peaceful space exploration activities. That doesn't mean eliminating specialized expertise, but rather integrating and streamlining operations where possible to improve coordination, resilience, and decision-making.

10. During your hearing, I asked if you intended, if confirmed, to cancel Gateway, the orbital lunar outpost that NASA currently plans to use as both the first step in a sustained human presence at the Moon and later on as the staging point for a manned mission to Mars. You said you "have no intention, as of now to…cancel any program…if I'm confirmed." The *Washington Post*, however, reported on Friday, April 11th that when OMB completed "pass back" of the forthcoming NASA budget request for fiscal year 2026, it came to light that the administration intends to cancel Gateway. Just this month NASA took possession of the main module of Gateway, beginning the process of assembly and integration with other sections. Despite the fact that NASA has the hardware on hand, and despite the fact that other, partner nations are actually shouldering 60 percent of Gateway's cost, the administration appears to want to cancel the entire effort.

    a. Given that NASA intends to use Gateway to meet the statutory requirement for a sustained human presence at the Moon, how will NASA (and you, if confirmed) meet this statutory obligation if Gateway is terminated?

Answer:

I am not aware of any plans to cancel Gateway, and as I stated during the hearing, I am fully committed to following the law as written. I would have to look into the specifics of this matter more closely, if confirmed.

b. If cancelled, how will you ensure the aforementioned international partners remain partners in the lunar exploration effort given that we might unilaterally upended their investments?

Answer:

American leadership in the ultimate high ground of space requires the contributions and trust of our international partners. Our credibility is paramount. I have no interest in seeing those relationships jeopardized or driving our allies into partnerships with geopolitical competitors.

While, again, I am not aware of any plans to cancel Gateway, if such a situation arose, I would work closely with our partners—as I have done in countless complex international negotiations in my business career—to find an acceptable path forward. I have a long track record of bringing people together to accomplish difficult, high-stakes objectives, and I would bring that same collaborative mindset to NASA.

c. Would NASA need additional taxpayer dollars to repay the international partners of Gateway for the investments and hardware contributions they have made to this point if Gateway is cancelled?

Answer:

I wouldn't want to speculate on something I'm not aware is actually under consideration.

11. The federal government is currently operating under a continuing resolution which extends the funding levels and funding provisions of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 appropriations act through the end of the current fiscal year. Importantly, Section 739 of the FY24 appropriations act states that agencies may not change programs, projects, or activities unless such changes are approved in a subsequent law. Section 1105 of the FY25 continuing resolution, under which the federal government is currently operating, extended this prohibition, stating:

    "Except as otherwise expressly provided in this division, the requirements, authorities, conditions, limitations, and other provisions of the appropriations Acts referred to in section 1101 shall continue in effect through [the end of FY25]."

    Given these explicit prohibitions, do you believe the agency has the legal authority to unilaterally cancel Gateway or make any changes listed in the forthcoming President's Budget Request (PBR)?

Answer:

I am not currently a party to any budget discussions and am not aware of any planned program cancellations. As I mentioned during my hearing, I believe NASA is capable of managing multiple world-changing endeavors—if we eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and stay focused on the mission. I remain hopeful that tough trades won't be required, but if they are, I would work closely with the Congress to ensure the best possible outcomes and to remain fully compliant with existing law. The goal must always be to fulfill the agency's obligations while advancing American leadership in space.

12. Public reporting indicates that FY26 PBR will propose significant changes to multiple NASA programs, including a number of exploration and science-focused programs. If confirmed, will you maintain progress on those programs until any changes are made in law, as is required by both current authorizing and appropriations law?

Answer:

I am not currently a party to any budget discussions and am not aware of any planned program cancellations. As I mentioned during my hearing, I believe NASA is capable of managing multiple world-changing endeavors—if we eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and stay focused on the mission. I remain hopeful that tough trades won't be required, but if they are, I would work closely with the Congress to ensure the best possible outcomes and to remain fully compliant with existing law. The goal must always be to fulfill the agency's obligations while advancing American leadership in space.

13. In your testimony, you highlighted the strategic importance of the Moon as a source of Helium-3. There are several commercial entities seeking to extract and return Helium-3 to the Earth for applications such as fusion energy. What do you see as NASA's role in enabling a robust commercial marketplace for resource extraction on the Moon?

Answer:

As I've said before, it's imperative that we crack the code on the space economy and shift away from a model where taxpayers are solely funding the future we all want to see in space. The first step is to make the most of the ISS—prioritizing high-potential science and research and ensuring we fully leverage its remaining life.

That said, I believe the next frontier of economic opportunity will extend to the lunar surface. If confirmed, I would support NASA in enabling early commercial efforts—through technical support, access to infrastructure, and policy leadership—while ensuring the agency remains focused on exploration, science, and stewardship of this new domain. If Helium-3 or other resources prove to be economically viable, NASA can play a vital role in catalyzing that marketplace in partnership with industry and international partners. This may very well be one of the paths to NASA becoming a self-sustaining agency.

SENATOR ROGER WICKER (R-MS)

1. NASA leadership at the John C. Stennis Space Center in Mississippi has made great strides in partnering with commercial space firms in rocket propulsion testing. However, barriers to more effective partnership, such as lengthy decision processes, cost, and risk acceptance persist within NASA.

If confirmed, how will you transform NASA to remove the barriers that inhibit the full utilization of NASA's world class test capabilities, such as lengthy decision-making processes and outdated regulations? How will you utilize your authorities to grow NASA's partnerships with commercial space industry for the use of land and infrastructure at NASA centers?

Answer:

NASA Stennis is a great example of how the agency can reinvent itself to better support commercial industry. That kind of transformation needs to happen across more of the organization. I have no doubt that outdated regulations, unnecessary layers of bureaucracy, and slow decision-making are inhibiting NASA's ability to fully leverage its world-class infrastructure—and ultimately slowing down mission delivery.

If confirmed, you can count on me to roll up my sleeves and get in the trenches to identify and remove those barriers. I will draw on everything I've learned from leading two successful companies, including in the aerospace and defense sectors, to help NASA become faster, more collaborative, and easier to do business with.

I would also fully utilize the Administrator's authorities to expand public-private partnerships—ensuring that land, infrastructure, and talent at NASA centers are being used to their full potential to support American innovation, grow the space economy, and accelerate the agency's core mission.

2. NASA is increasing its reliance on the commercial space sector to execute its mission. For example, the International Space Station will be decommissioned in 2030, and will be replaced by commercial space stations. It is important for the United States government to both grow the commercial space industry and maintain government activity in space, especially as our key competitors, China and Russia, have increased their space presence and developed launch vehicles capable of reaching all orbits and satellite constellations for remote sensing, navigation, and communications.

If confirmed, will it be a priority of yours to continue to invest in federal capabilities at NASA field centers? I believe we can balance increasing opportunities for commercial space industry with the need to maintain federal investments in space exploration. Is that a balance that you support?

Answer:

Yes, I believe that balance is not only possible—but essential. NASA has partnered with commercial industry since its inception, and the line of responsibility has always been clear: NASA should focus on

the near-impossible—those missions and technologies that no other organization, company, or country is capable of achieving.

When NASA accomplishes a major breakthrough, it should hand off that capability to commercial partners and shift its focus to the next frontier. That's how we scale innovation, grow the space economy, and maintain American leadership.

For example, as industry continues to mature in chemical propulsion, NASA should already be shifting its focus toward nuclear propulsion and other next-generation technologies. That's what it means to push the edge of the possible. If confirmed, I would support continued investment in NASA's field centers—not just to preserve core capabilities, but to ensure we're always preparing for the next leap forward.

SENATOR JOHN CURTIS (R-UT)

Artemis/Defense in UT

1. Utah is home to Northrop Grumman's Solid Rocket Motor production. Companies in Utah are then able to leverage this technology to help lower the costs of no-fail national security missions. As a result, Artemis contributes to reducing costs for defense research and production. **As Administrator, how would you implement efficiencies to lower production costs for Space Launch System components?**

Answer:

Solid rocket motor production—like the work done in Utah—is a critical national capability that not only supports Artemis but also strengthens our no-fail defense programs. I understand and appreciate the strategic importance of these industrial synergies, and I believe Artemis can and should contribute to a broader ecosystem of innovation, workforce development, and supply chain resilience.

That said, SLS has faced well-documented cost and program challenges. If confirmed, I would work to implement greater accountability and transparency in the production of SLS components alongside a broader cultural mission-first transformation at the agency. It has taken long enough, cost enough and it's time to get back to the Moon, to do so before our rivals get there and press on to Mars.

2. Utah continues to face serious challenges related to drought, wildfire risk, and declining water levels, and particularly at the Great Salt Lake. **If confirmed, how would you ensure that NASA continues to prioritize Earth science efforts—like satellite-based drought monitoring and water resource modeling—that help states like Utah manage these risks?**

Answer:

I believe Earth science is one of NASA's most important missions—because it delivers real, measurable benefits to the American people. Satellite-based observations, including drought monitoring, wildfire forecasting, and water resource modeling, provide critical data that helps communities and those suffering from real hardships that cost billions to remediate.

If confirmed, I will ensure that NASA continues to prioritize high-impact science efforts that support agriculture, safeguard infrastructure, and help states respond to drought and natural disasters. We should be using our space-based assets not only to explore the solar system, but to protect and better understand our own planet.

SENATOR SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO (R-WV)

WV Visit

1. Mr. Isaacman, thank you for your willingness to serve and for speaking with me on Monday. The IV&V Center in Fairmont, West Virginia is the home of NASA's IVV Program and is a critical resource to the agency. The center has identified and fixed thousands of software defects, including 18,000 for the Artemis I projects alone. I would love to host you at the IV&V Center in Fairmont so you can see for yourself how invested they are in safety and mission success.

If confirmed can you commit to visiting this important facility with me?

Answer:

Yes. It would be my pleasure.

Space Collaboratives

2. I am a strong supporter of the Keystone Space Collaborative (KSC). As a Pennsylvanian I'm sure you recognize that the contributions to our space program and the aerospace industry aren't limited to just a few geographic regions. Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia offer the resources, expertise, research and workforce to make major contributions.

How will you prioritize working with this collaborative and with other stakeholders across the country?

Answer:

Absolutely—as mentioned in the hearing, I believe NASA will need the best and brightest from across the nation to achieve world-changing objectives. Organizations like the Keystone Space Collaborative are helping to ensure that Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and other regions play a critical role in shaping the future of aerospace and space exploration.