

**STATEMENT OF
COMMISSIONER GEOFFREY STARKS**

Re: *Allocation of Spectrum for Non-Federal Space Launch Operations*, ET Docket No. 13-115

As we enjoy a new golden age of space exploration, the FCC must ensure its policies continue to encourage American leadership. Since the early days of space exploration, our nation has looked to the federal government to promote our critical security, economic, and scientific interests in space. And as we all know, in the last few years, the private sector has assumed an increasingly central role in facilitating our cosmic future. Just last week, NASA selected an American company to build spacecraft that would land astronauts on the moon for the first time in half a century. Unfortunately, the FCC's space launch spectrum policies don't reflect this new reality. That's why I urged the Commission back in 2019 to take action on this long-dormant proceeding and update those policies. I'm pleased that today's actions will do just that, providing more certainty to the rapidly growing commercial space industry and spurring future proceedings that should reenergize our rules to meet the innovation and dynamism of the moment.

Access to wireless spectrum is vital for commercial space launch operators to reliably communicate with their launch vehicles. These operators have long used spectrum licensed to Federal users. Rather than having broad authority to use this spectrum when needed, however, providers must obtain a Special Temporary Authorization for each launch because of the spectrum's Federal allocation. Under this process, operators file their STA applications and Commission staff engage with their counterparts at other federal agencies to negotiate access to the spectrum. If any details of the launch change – which frequently happens -- the operator must go through the STA process again to rework the authorization. In addition, these STAs are valid for only a single launch and expire after six months, so operators often must prepare numerous duplicative applications.

This approach may have made sense when launches occurred infrequently. Times change. American space companies have transformed the industry by improving technology and investing in reusable launch vehicles. Multiple launches now occur each month, and a single American launch company had 26 successful launches last year. The STA process is no longer practical for these launches.

Today we update our policies to grant a non-Federal secondary allocation for specified frequencies in the 2200-2290 MHz band during commercial space launches. The allocation will be limited to the telemetry, tracking, and telecommand operations of launch vehicles or spacecraft during pre-launch testing and space launch operations. This new allocation will allow approved operators to launch on a regular, licensed basis, providing them with certainty as to which frequency bands can be used for non-federal space launch operations so they can plan and invest in future space launch activities.

Adopting this allocation is a critical step in the Commission's effort to develop a new licensing framework and technical rules governing commercial launch operations. We also seek

comment on whether to create licensing regimes for other bands that are currently used for commercial space launch operations, and what rules should apply to those operations. I was pleased that my colleagues agreed with my proposal to modify the original draft to reflect the spectrum used for non-rocket-based launch operations, as well as to seek comment on the commercial space sector's other spectrum needs, including the spectrum requirements for commercial spaceports and post-launch communications. I encourage commenters to identify the FCC rules that may need to be amended to facilitate innovation and sustainability in this important industry.

Given the increasing pace of launches, we must move forward quickly to ensure the growth of our vibrant commercial space industry. This new era of spaceflight is still unfolding, and many in this sector see no limits. The Commission must support this blossoming industry by enacting policies that ensure American leadership flourishes in this new Space Race.

Thank you to the staff from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, International Bureau, and the Office of Engineering and Technology for their work on this item.