



Texas Space Commission

Testimony for the Committee on Delivery of Government Efficiency

3/5/2025 | Gwen Griffin, Chair, Texas Space Commission

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. I'm Gwen Griffin, here today representing the Texas Space Commission. I'm also the founder and CEO of Griffin Communications Group, a 27-year-old Texas-based small business.

As a native Texan and executive in the space industry, I am honored to serve as the first Chair of the Texas Space Commission. Thank you for the invitation to provide an update on the activities and accomplishments of the Texas Space Commission – one of your newest state agencies.

The Space Commission and the Texas Aerospace Research & Space Economy Consortium – or TARSEC – were created in the last legislative session with the approval of House Bill 3447. Our defined goal is to promote innovation in the field of space operations and commercial aerospace opportunities, including the integration of space, aeronautics, and aviation industries into the Texas economy.

It's the right time for Texas to focus on aerospace. The global space economy is rapidly evolving and growing from a predominantly government funded - to a commercially led - ecosystem and is expected to be worth \$1.8 trillion dollars by 2035. So, why is space important to us all? We go to space for Earth and humanity.

Research resulting in lifesaving medications, such as Keytruda, are being done today on the International Space Station in Low Earth Orbit. We must ensure there's no gap in transition from the ISS to a commercially owned space station to continue this work in 2030. We need to establish a permanent presence on the Moon. Resources that can benefit our lives such as Helium 3 are abundant on the lunar surface. We need to learn how to mine them and bring them back to Earth.



Texas Space Commission

And Space is a matter of national security. The importance of maintaining U.S. global leadership in space is imperative. Imagine the consequences of an adversarial nation taking out our national security satellites, our emergency communication systems, for example. It would cripple our nation and our freedom.

So, thank you for creating the Space Commission so Texas can impact the nation as we do in many other industries. I'm hopeful that my remarks and the two-page summary we've provided will demonstrate our work in delivering on the Commission's stated purpose over the past 11 months.

TSC Overview

I'd like to provide an overview of our organizational structure. As you may know, the Space Commission is governed by a 9-member Board of Directors and our advisory board, TARSEC, is governed by a 9-member Executive Committee. Both entities were appointed last March at an event with Governor Abbott and Speaker Phee-lan at NASA's Johnson Space Center.

The Board of the Space Commission consists of 3 individuals appointed by the Governor, 3 by the Lt. Governor, and 3 by the House Speaker. For the Executive Committee of TARSEC, 2 are appointed by the Governor, 2 by the Lt. Governor, and 2 by the House Speaker, as well as a designee for the chancellors of the UT System and Texas A&M System, and the president of Rice University.

As you can see on the hand-out, I'm working with some of the best leaders in the industry.

TSC Timeline and accomplishments

We've made a lot of progress in a brief period time. Since the Board appointments were announced last March, we've held 11 Open Meetings. We hired Norman Garza, Jr., as the Executive Director on July 1, 2024, followed by our Chief Compliance Officer Erin Chancellor and Deputy Exec. Dir. Blake Calvert in August. They've worked quickly and thoughtfully to bring on additional grant and program professionals to administer the day-to-day operations of the Commission.



Texas Space Commission

As outlined in statute, the primary focus of The Board and staff has been to establish the Space Exploration & Aeronautics Research Fund, or SEARF grant program with the \$150 million dollars appropriated through House Bill 1 in 2023.

We weren't sure what the demand signal would be for grant requests, and it *certainly* exceeded our expectations. We opened the grant submission period in mid-September and in four months we closed it after funding requests dwarfed the \$150 million allotted to the Commission. In that short timeframe, we received 281 applications with funding requests totaling \$3.4 billion dollars. You can see the breakdown at the top of page 2 for the categories of applicants.

To describe this response as enthusiastic is, perhaps, an understatement!

To ensure proper compliance with state guidelines as well as the administrative rules adopted by the Board, our staff has worked tirelessly to conduct due diligence and background research on each application before presenting it to non-conflicted Board members for review and evaluation.

January marked the first Open Meeting to consider approval of SEARF applications in which \$21.5 million was approved by the Board for four SEARF grant awards. At our most recent Open Meeting in February, we approved \$47.7 million for five additional awards. The Commission staff is now working closely with these entities to enter into a Contract Agreement for these reimbursable funds. We now have approximately \$80.8 million remaining for additional grant awards. We intend to consider approval of more awards later this month in our next Open Meeting.

I'd like to mention that, because the SEARF is a trust held outside the treasury, the initial \$150 million was invested in the Treasury Pool and has earned approximately \$10.2 million in interest to date which has been credited back to the fund. It allows us to cover all operating expenses for the Commission out of earnings vs. grant funds. These earnings allow us multiple years of operating expenses.

It's the Board's intent to award the full \$150 million in grants to private and public businesses, non-profit and governmental entities, including institutes of higher education for the purpose of advancing space exploration, research and aeronautics.



Texas Space Commission

The Texas Space Opportunity

We are at a pivotal moment in strengthening and accelerating the Texas Space Economy across industry sectors and geographic regions of the State. If you note the second hand-out, it's remarkable that in the last 8 days, commercial space companies in Texas have led the nation *and the world* in significant space milestones and advancements:

- From their Launch Site One in Van Horn, Texas, the Blue Origin team successfully launched their 10th crew of individuals on their New Shepard suborbital rocket to rapidly increase the number of humans to experience the overview effect of seeing Earth, our home, from Space. Thanks to Blue Origin more than 52 astronauts have now flown to space from Texas soil within the past 4 years. Suborbital flight has also become a valuable testbed for NASA, commercial companies and academia to conduct research in space at a much lower cost than orbital flight.
- The next day, last Wednesday, Intuitive Machines, a commercial company headquartered at the Houston Spaceport, launched its second robotic lander, Athena, to the Moon. Attie, as she's fondly called by the IM team, is on track to touch down on the south pole of the lunar surface tomorrow morning. The IM-2 mission aims to locate and analyze water ice deposits, among numerous other science payloads from commercial companies.
- Just 4 days later, early Sunday morning, the mission control team at Cedar Park-based Firefly Aerospace *nailed* a soft landing of their robotic Blue Ghost lander on the Moon's surface as we celebrated Texas Independence Day. This commercial mission will allow scientific experiments to study lunar dust and regolith properties which can provide valuable resources here at home.
- And today at 5:30, SpaceX is scheduled to conduct the 8th flight test of Starship, the world's largest rocket, from its headquarters at Boca Chica. The mission will further evaluate the performance of the fully reusable launch system for missions to earth's orbit, the Moon, and Mars.

This is unprecedented. Seriously, never before has this much progress and activity occurred in unison. And every one of these missions were based in Texas – with commercial space companies leading the way, and NASA as a key customer!



Texas Space Commission

And this is just a glimpse at what's happening in space here in Texas. There are hundreds of space-focused entities across the Lone Star State developing new technologies and reaching key milestones every day. And through your trust in the Space Commission, we are now doing our part to enable rapid industry growth and success.

I've been amazed by how many states and organizations are tracking the creation and work of the Texas Space Commission and the SEARF grant program. Longtime colleagues and national leaders are applauding our efforts and commitment to space. Thank you.

Three weeks ago, Governor Abbott and I met with NASA's Acting Administrator Janet Petro at NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C., to reinforce our commitment to the emerging space ecosystem that is critical to the success of NASA now and in the future. To remain the global leaders in human and robotic spaceflight, our federal agencies can't do it without commercial industry partnerships.

While in DC, I also met with U.S. Rep. (Dr.) Brian Babin and U.S. Senator Ted Cruz, who each currently chair congressional committees with jurisdiction over NASA, giving further visibility to the growth of the space economy in Texas.

Additionally, in the past few months I've had the opportunity to meet with five U.S. Space Force generals to talk about their needs related to national security. In each meeting, I'm reminded that space is the next warfighting domain, and that we must move quickly to prepare our nation to maintain global leadership. We cannot cede space to China. The impact is irreversible, and our freedom is in jeopardy. Like other military branches, the Space Force wants to expand in Texas further growing our space ecosystem.

To conclude, the state of Texas has much to be proud of when it comes to the aerospace industry and the groundbreaking activities and research being conducted here.

The SEARF grant program has been cited as a clear signal of Texas' investment and belief in the space industry, as well as the Space Commission's ability to connect and nurture the many moving parts across the space economy. We are ready to continue and expand this work to ensure Texas' position as a leader in this nation.

Thank you for your time, and I am ready to answer any questions.