

Calendar No. 173

119TH CONGRESS }
1st Session }

SENATE

{ REPORT
119-68

ACCESSING SATELLITE CAPABILITIES TO
ENABLE NEW DISCOVERIES ACT

R E P O R T

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND
TRANSPORTATION

ON

S. 1437



SEPTEMBER 29, 2025.—Ordered to be printed

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

59-010

WASHINGTON : 2025

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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Mr. CRUZ, from the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
Transportation, submitted the following

R E P O R T

[To accompany S. 1437]

[Including cost estimate of the Congressional Budget Office]

The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, to which was referred the bill (S. 1437) to require the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to establish a program to identify, evaluate, acquire, and disseminate commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery in order to satisfy the scientific, operational, and educational requirements of the Administration, and for other purposes, having considered the same, reports favorably thereon with an amendment in the nature of a substitute and recommends that the bill, as amended, do pass.

PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of S. 1437 is to require the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to establish a program to identify, evaluate, acquire, and disseminate commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery in order to satisfy the scientific, operational, and educational requirements of the agency, and where appropriate, of other Federal agencies and scientific researchers.

BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

The Commercial Satellite Data Acquisition (CSDA) program was established as a pilot program in 2017 by NASA's Earth Science Division (ESD) to identify, evaluate, and acquire images and data from commercial small satellites (SmallSat) to support NASA's

Earth science research and application goals.¹ The pilot program awarded contracts to three companies to collect satellite imagery to observe changes in the Earth’s forests, farmland, oceans, and atmosphere and to provide that information to researchers and other government agencies. This bill makes the pilot program permanent. The purchase of commercial satellite imagery not only supplements and complements data collected by NASA’s in-house satellites, but it provides a consistent customer for the emerging commercial space industry and ensures customers have readily available data for use.

NASA’s ESD will be responsible for maintaining up-to-date knowledge of the commercial SmallSat industry so the agency may be a “smart buyer” of commercial data. To facilitate standard scientific collaborations, NASA will seek end-user license terms and conditions to enable broad levels of dissemination and shareability of the commercial data with U.S. Government agencies and partners. NASA may also maintain an archive of the data acquired from the commercial vendors for future use.

SUMMARY OF PROVISION

S. 1437 would amend chapter 603 of title 51, United States Code by adding section 60307, Commercial Satellite Data Acquisition Program, to authorize NASA to acquire cost-effective, space-based commercial Earth remote sensing data, services, distribution, and applications from commercial providers to complement the scientific, operational, and educational requirements of the Administration, and where appropriate, of other Federal agencies and scientific researchers.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

S. 1437 was introduced on April 10, 2025, by Senator Hickenlooper (for himself and Senator Cornyn) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate. On April 30, 2025, the Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered S. 1437 reported favorably with an amendment (in the nature of a substitute).

Similar legislative text that also amends chapter 603 of title 51 of the United States Code is included in S. 933, NASA Transition Authorization Act of 2025. S. 933 was introduced on March 11, 2025, by Senator Cruz (for himself and Senators Cantwell, Moran, Peters, Schmitt, Luján, and Duckworth) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate.

H.R. 2600, a House companion bill to S. 1437, was introduced on April 2, 2025, by Representative Hurd (for himself and Representative Bonamici) and was referred to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives. On April 29, 2025, that Committee met in open Executive Session and, by voice vote, ordered H.R. 2600 to be reported favorably. Representatives Subramanyam, Crank, and Gillen are additional cosponsors.

¹“Private-Sector Small Constellation Satellite Data Product Pilot Evaluation,” NASA, <https://www.earthdata.nasa.gov/about/csda/private-sector-small-constellation-satellite-data-product-pilot-evaluation>.

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S. 2634, the ASCEND Act, was introduced on July 27, 2023, by Senator Hickenlooper (for himself and Senator Cornyn) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate.

Similar legislative text that also amends chapter 603 of title 51, United States Code, was included in S. 5600, NASA Transition Authorization Act of 2024. S. 5600 was introduced on December 18, 2024, by Senator Cantwell (for herself and Senators Cruz, Sinema, Schmitt, Luján, and Wicker) and was referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate.

H.R. 6219, a House companion bill to S. 2634, was introduced on November 3, 2023, by Representative Kean (for himself and Representative Bonamici) and was referred to the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives. Representative Fitzpatrick was an additional cosponsor. On March 20, 2024, that Committee met in open Executive Session and, by a roll call vote of 37–0, ordered H.R. 6219 reported favorably with an amendment. On September 23, 2024, the House passed H.R. 6219 by voice vote.

ESTIMATED COSTS

In accordance with paragraph 11(a) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate and section 403 of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974, the Committee provides the following cost estimate, prepared by the Congressional Budget Office:

At a Glance			
NASA Legislation			
As ordered reported by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation on April 30, 2025			
On April 30, 2025, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation ordered 17 bills to be reported. This document provides estimates for the 3 of those bills that would affect the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).			
CBO estimates that S. 606 would increase spending subject to appropriation by \$18 million over the 2025-2030 period. S. 1081 and S. 1437 would each increase spending subject to appropriation by less than \$500,000 over the 2025-2030 period, CBO estimates.			
None of the bills would increase direct spending or revenues; thus, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply.			
CBO estimates that none of the bills would increase net direct spending or on-budget deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036.			
None of the bills contain intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.			
Bill	Net Increase or Decrease (-) in the Deficit Over the 2025-2035 Period (Millions of Dollars)	Changes in Spending Subject to Appropriation Over the 2025-2030 Period (Outlays, Millions of Dollars)	Mandate Effects?
S. 606	0	18	No
S. 1081	0	*	No
S. 1437	0	*	No
* = between zero and \$500,000.			

Summary of legislation: On April 30, 2025, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation ordered 17 bills to be reported. This document provides estimates for 3 of those bills, specified below:

- S. 606 would allow the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to enter into an agreement to reimburse the Town of Chincoteague, Virginia, for relocating wells for drinking water from NASA-administered property to the town.
- S. 1081 would expand NASA's requirements for reporting to the Congress.
- S. 1437 would require NASA to establish a program to collect and disseminate remote-sensing data and to report to the Congress on that program.

Estimated Federal cost: The costs of the legislation fall within budget function 250 (general science, space, and technology).

Basis of estimate: For this estimate, CBO assumes that each bill will be enacted near the end of fiscal year 2025 and that the estimated amounts will be available each year. This cost estimate does not include any effects of interactions among the bills. If all three bills were combined and enacted as a single piece of legislation, the effects could be different from the sum of the separate estimates, although CBO expects that any differences would be small.

S. 606, the Contaminated Wells Relocation Act, would authorize the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to enter into an agreement with the Town of Chincoteague, Virginia, to reimburse the costs of removing and relocating three wells for drinking water that are currently located on property administered by NASA. The bill would require NASA to submit the agreement to the Congress within 18 months of enactment. Using information from the agency on the historical cost for similar activities and adjusting for inflation, CBO estimates that the agreement would cost \$18 million over the 2025–2030 period. Any related spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

S. 1081, the Comprehensive NASA Reporting Act of 2025, would require the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to provide the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation and the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology with copies of any final reports or notifications that it submits to any other Congressional committee or office within 10 days of the original submission. The bill also would require NASA to provide to the Congress a copy of any international agreement involving outer space activities within 15 days of the United States becoming a signatory to that agreement. Based on the cost of similar activities, CBO estimates that implementing the bill's reporting requirements would cost less than \$500,000 over the 2025–2030 period. Any related spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

S. 1437, the ASCEND Act, would codify the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Commercial SmallSat Data Acquisition pilot program, which identifies commercial sources for acquiring remote-sensing data and imagery of the Earth. Data collected would be disseminated internally, to other federal agencies, and to researchers. The bill would require NASA to report to the Congress within 180 days of enactment and annually thereafter on all agreements established under the program. Based on the cost of similar activities, CBO estimates that implementing the bill's reporting requirements would cost less than \$500,000 over the 2025–2030 period. Any related spending would be subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

Pay-As-You-Go considerations: The Statutory Pay-As-You-Go Act of 2010 establishes budget-reporting and enforcement procedures for legislation affecting direct spending or revenues. None of the bills would affect direct spending or revenues; thus, pay-as-you-go procedures do not apply.

Increase in long-term net direct spending and deficits: CBO estimates that enacting S. 606, S. 1081, and S. 1437 would not increase net direct spending or deficits in any of the four consecutive 10-year periods beginning in 2036.

Mandates: None of the bills contain intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act.

Estimate prepared by: Federal Costs: Willow Latham-Proença; Mandates: Brandon Lever.

Estimate reviewed by: Ann E. Futrell, Chief, Natural and Physical Resources Cost Estimates Unit; Kathleen FitzGerald, Chief, Public and Private Mandates Unit; H. Samuel Papenfuss, Deputy Director of Budget Analysis.

Estimate approved by: Phillip L. Swagel, Director, Congressional Budget Office.

REGULATORY IMPACT STATEMENT

In accordance with paragraph 11(b) of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides the following evaluation of the regulatory impact of the legislation, as reported:

NUMBER OF PERSONS COVERED

S. 1437 would authorize NASA to acquire cost-effective, space-based Earth remote sensing data, services, distribution, and applications from commercial providers for scientific and research purposes consistent with the priorities of the agency, and where appropriate, of other Federal agencies and scientific researchers. Data gathered and disseminated by NASA and through commercial partners within this legislation may be accessible globally.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

S. 1437 is not expected to have an adverse impact on the Nation's economy. By codifying the program with commercial satellite producers, it may support continued growth within the sector. The data used may provide economic benefits for the Nation, for example, in the agrarian sector.

PRIVACY

S. 1437 would not impact the personal privacy of individuals.

PAPERWORK

The legislation would not increase paperwork requirements for private individuals or businesses. The bill would require the Administrator of NASA to submit an annual report no later than 180 days after enactment listing all commercial vendors providing Earth remote sensing data and imagery, a description of the end-use license terms and conditions for each vendor, a description of the manner in which each vendor is advancing scientific research,

and information regarding agreements the Administrator has entered with a commercial vendor or Federal agency.

CONGRESSIONALLY DIRECTED SPENDING

In compliance with paragraph 4(b) of rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the Committee provides that no provisions contained in the bill, as reported, meet the definition of congressionally directed spending items under the rule.

SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

Section 1. Short title

This section would provide that the bill may be cited as the “Accessing Satellite Capabilities to Enable New Discoveries Act” or the “ASCEND Act”.

Section 2. Commercial satellite data

Subsection (a) would state that Congress finds that NASA’s Earth Science program aims to enhance understanding of Earth and human impacts through research and observations, and that NASA has successfully implemented a pilot program to acquire valuable Earth remote sensing data from commercial small satellite providers, expanding access and commercial participation.

Subsection (b) would direct the Administrator of NASA to establish a permanent NASA Commercial Satellite Data Acquisition Program to buy and share cost-effective commercial Earth observation data. The program would prioritize making the data or derived information publicly accessible for scientific purposes, encourage procurement from U.S. vendors when possible, and allow flexible licensing to broaden data use. NASA would be required to send annual reports to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives detailing vendors, licensing terms, and how the data supports scientific research and is shared with other government agencies.

CHANGES IN EXISTING LAW

In compliance with paragraph 12 of rule XXVI of the Standing Rules of the Senate, changes in existing law made by the bill, as reported, are shown as follows (existing law proposed to be omitted is enclosed in black brackets, new material is printed in italic, existing law in which no change is proposed is shown in roman):

UNITED STATES CODE

* * * * *

TITLE 51—NATIONAL AND COMMERCIAL SPACE PROGRAMS

* * * * *

Subtitle VI—Earth Observations

* * * * *

CHAPTER 603—REMOTE SENSING

* * * * *

§ 60306. Education

The Administrator shall establish an educational outreach program to increase awareness at institutions of higher education and State, local, regional, and tribal agencies of the potential applications of remote sensing and other geospatial information and awareness of the need for geospatial workforce development.

§ 60307. Commercial Satellite Data Acquisition Program

(a) *IN GENERAL.*—The Administrator shall establish within the Earth Science Division of the Science Mission Directorate a program, to be known as the “Commercial Satellite Data Acquisition Program”, to cost-effectively acquire and disseminate commercial Earth observation data and imagery in order to complement the scientific, operational, and educational requirements of the Administration, and where appropriate, of other Federal agencies and scientific researchers.

(b) *DATA PUBLICATION AND ACCESSIBILITY.*—The terms and conditions of commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery acquisitions under the program described in subsection (a) shall not prevent—

(1) the publication of commercial data or imagery in academic or scientific articles, papers, or other similar publications for scientific purposes; or

(2) the publication, in academic or scientific articles, papers, or other similar publications, of information that is derived from, incorporates, or enhances the original commercial data or imagery of a vendor.

(c) *AUTHORIZATION.*—

(1) *IN GENERAL.*—In carrying out the program under this section, the Administrator may—

(A) procure commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery from commercial vendors to advance scientific research and applications for the purpose set forth in subsection (a); and

(B) establish or modify end-use license terms and conditions to allow for the widest possible use of procured commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery by individuals other than NASA-funded users, consistent with the goals of the program.

(2) *ACQUISITION FROM UNITED STATES VENDORS.*—The commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery procured under this subsection shall be procured, to the maximum extent practicable, from United States vendors.

(d) *REPORT.*—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this section, and annually thereafter, the Administrator shall submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the House of Representatives a report that includes the following:

(1)(A) *In the case of the initial report, a list of all vendors that are providing commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery to NASA as of the date of the report.*

(B) *For each subsequent report, a list of all vendors that have provided commercial Earth remote sensing data and imagery to NASA during the reporting period.*

(2) *A description of the end-use license terms and conditions for each such vendor.*

(3) *A description of the manner in which each such vendor is advancing scientific research and applications, including priorities recommended by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine decadal surveys.*

(4) *Information specifying whether the Administrator has entered into an agreement with a commercial vendor or a Federal agency that permits the use of data and imagery by Federal Government employees, contractors, or non-Federal users.*

(e) *DEFINITION OF UNITED STATES VENDOR.—In this section, the term “United States vendor” means a commercial or nonprofit entity incorporated in the United States.*

* * * * *

