

US Senator Maria Cantwell

Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Hearing on Jared Isaacman to be NASA Administrator and Olivia Trusty to be a Member of the FCC

April 9th, 2025

Opening Remarks

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning to our two nominees, Mr. Isaacman and Ms. Trusty, congratulations on this nomination. Mr. Isaacman, obviously for NASA and Ms. Trusty for the Federal Communications [Commission].

First, Mr. Isaacman, nominee for the Administrator of NASA, as my colleague was just saying, the space race is heating up. You will have a critical task of delivering mission critical on time and on budget challenges for the United States of America over the next four years to make sure that we don't lose in that space race. This includes successful execution on the Artemis program, which will take the United States back to the Moon, and ultimately the goal of getting to Mars. The NASA Authorization bill, which Senator Cruz and I cosponsored, strongly backs the Artemis program. It includes lunar lander redundancy, [the] NASA Space Launch SLS system, and [is] critical to America's leadership in space [and] getting Americans back to the moon.

The State of Washington has long been a home to aviation, but now, with over 40 companies across the State of Washington producing space-related products. We have over 2000 employees working just on the Artemis program. So we're invested. These companies supply components for the Gateway Space Station, the Orion Crew Capsule, [one of] two crewed lunar landers, the SLS heavy lift rocket and its ground system.

Beyond space exploration, NASA is also one of the world's top R&D organizations. We had a chance to talk about that in my office, about NASA's discoveries and science that are helping us with our aerospace industry overall. NASA scientists and engineers provide the crucial evidence and information to both government and industry on issues like AI, quantum, advanced aerospace materials, and next generation manufacturing. So, I know a consortium in my state standing up a tech hub has been an applicant that NASA has been very supportive of.

I do have concerns as we move forward, about reports in the press about where the administration will come down on investments. I hope we can talk about this today and clarify your position as it relates to these priorities for our nation. For example, in March, last month, the Wall Street Journal reported that [the] Trump Administration was considering major changes to the Artemis program. You too have also made past statements about changes to the program, and if NASA does terminate the SLS and relies only on commercial rockets such as SpaceX and Blue Origin New Glenn, experts say Americans won't get to the moon before the end of the decade. So a lot of scientific analysis resting on your shoulders, and then the budget capabilities to convince our colleagues to make these investments. Like the Chairman, I want to win the race.

I want to make sure that China doesn't beat us to Mars, and I hope that even with these recent announcements of theirs that we beat them to the moon.

I strongly believe that safety and resiliency built through redundancy and innovation through competition is a key. So I would like to hear your views on that this morning.

We are also seeing the Administration and DOGE specifically cancel research grants to fund the science agency and lay off highly skilled technical experts across the federal government. According to the news reports, NASA has confirmed an announcement by DOGE that up to \$420 million in agency contracts have been canceled. So this is of concern sorting out how this cancellation impacts many different organizations.

Meanwhile, tomorrow is the last day of work for several top NASA advisors, including the Chief Economist, the Chief Scientist, and the Chief Technologist. Their positions were eliminated because of the DOGE agenda.

Reports indicate that the FY 2026 budget request might slash NASA's science funding by half.

So Mr. Isaacman, all of these are in the news, and we will want to understand your commitment to these issues, or understanding your strategy about how you see us making these commitments to invest in science for the future.

Now to Ms. Trusty. Certainly, welcome to you and your family who is here. I think you definitely outnumber the astronauts in the room, which we very much appreciate. It's good to have that support, and your nomination comes at a critical time for the FCC.

We want to have a communication system that is admired by the world, and we know that you're no stranger to this issue, working very diligently for Senator Wicker, both here on this committee and now on the Armed Services Committee.

The FCC plays a vital role in spectrum policy management and commercial airwaves, and I've long advocated, as I said in my earlier statement, for an evidence-based system. And during the first Trump administration, the rush to auction, I think, raised some concerns, and most notably they sold the C-Band without proper FAA coordination about the impacts of aircraft altimeters creating an unnecessary problem that almost caused flights to be grounded, and slowed down the implementation of 5G.

So I hope we'll hear about that issue, how you see us getting a more balanced approach and communication.

Because of the FCC's influence over some of our most important institutions, including the media and the internet and providers, the FCC is an independent agency not subject to direct presidential control, but this tradition is under attack. The Trump administration is seeking to bring independent agencies like the FCC under the President's direct control.

Recently, the president fired two Democratic commissioners at the independent Federal Trade Commission without cause. So let me be clear, removing independent commissioners based on their party affiliation sets a dangerous precedent.

I expect this administration will maintain a fully staffed FCC with five commissioners, including two Democrats. And meanwhile, the Trump administration FCC chair has launched a series of investigations into media companies that the President doesn't like, so I was very happy to see this recent decision on holding up the AP. Very important to have a very, very competitive landscape when it comes to media and news production.

The FCC should return to its long standing role as a neutral, independent regulator, and so look forward to asking you questions about that as well today.

But again, congratulations on your nomination.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Q&A Part 1

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and continuing on this same point, listen, I have no doubt of your capabilities at the technical side of this and the expertise, both on the aviation and the space side. It's a question, I think, of a long term challenge of different administrations to deliver on this goal. And how each administration and each Congress does or doesn't support it. So, I view your job as like wrangling the powers that be to support the mission and understand what it's going to take to support the mission. So like Senator Cruz, I want to understand a little bit more about your commitments.

The most recent economic impact report highlighted that in Fiscal Year 2023 NASA projects generated more than \$75 billion in economic output. And the National Academy study chaired by Norm Augustine found that NASA's Budget is often incompatible with the scope, complexity and difficulty of its mission work. That means that we end up short changing it to certain degrees. So, I want to make sure I understand what your commitment is, because there's been so much in the press. Do you commit not to closing any of the NASA's 10 centers, or divesting from critical infrastructure without the expressed authorization of Congress?

Isaacman: Senator, you absolutely have my commitment to work alongside Congress. I think NASA is going to require the best and brightest from across the nation and all of our critical infrastructure in order to achieve its mission, to do the near impossible for all humankind.

Sen. Cantwell: Do you see any reason to close these 10 centers?

Isaacman: Senator, there's only so much that I can be briefed on in advance of this opportunity. I fully expect to roll up my sleeves and determine where all of our best resources are so we can get back to achieving the mission as quickly as possible.

Sen. Cantwell: The 2024 National Academies report noted that the use of service and firm fixed price contracts at early stage of technology development can jeopardize mission success and degrade NASA's own in house technical capabilities. What are your thoughts about these fixed term contracts?

Isaacman: Senator as someone –

Sen. Cantwell: Do you agree with that statement? They could be deleterious. I'm just asking if you agree with that.

Isaacman: Well, I take two things away from that, Senator. First, I mean having run a defense aerospace company for more than a decade, and generally, I am a fan of fixed firm price contracts and being held accountable to what we bid. In terms of the difference between NASA's in house expertise and what commercial industry is able to provide, I believe NASA should be working on, again, per my prepared remarks, on the near impossible, what no one else is capable of doing. And when they figure it out, commercial industry takes over and brings the rest of the world to follow.

Sen. Cantwell: You might be one heck of entrepreneur in relation to science. You said you're not a scientist, but that won't matter if we make very bad decisions based on somebody's arbitrary budget analysis instead of what is our long term mission. So that's what we're trying to get out of you: How do you think we're going to accomplish this so that we have a more -- listen, the more we can explain this to everybody, I guarantee you, the more my colleagues will support it in a budget. The more it gets slashed and burned by different approaches, by DOGE, the more harmful it can become to people undermining the support for the mission overall. So you have a big challenge here. It's to move us forward at a critical moment. So do you believe that we should have a reduction in workforce or the science budget - some of the things that I mentioned in my opening statement?

Isaacman: Senator, I read what's on NASA Watch and in the news, like everybody else. If I'm confirmed, I am eager to understand all of the considerations, the discussions being made about a reorganization. I believe that we are going to need the best and brightest to do the near impossible, and we should be concentrating all of our resources on the most critical objectives that I kind of outlined in my opening remarks, ma'am.

Sen. Cantwell: Do you support the continued Artemis mission with the Space Launch System?

Isaacman: Senator, I believe that is currently the plan. I'd like nothing more than to see this Artemis 2 crew get a get around the moon, and then they're back at home watching their friends walk on the moon. I think the real question is, again, why has it taken so long? Why does it cost so much money? And --

Sen. Cantwell: But in the issue of, are we going to commit to this? I think this and the lander redundancy are kind of like -- people see that as a we're going to the moon and we're going to get this done. Not this discussion of, we're going to skip these things, short change this, and then we're going to focus on Mars in a different route. That's what I'm trying to get from you, whether when you get there, I get that you're saying it's the current plan. I'm asking you as a nominee to run this organization. Do you have a different view of that? That you think right now there is a different way to do this?

Isaacman: Ma'am, I can tell you, not just as a nominee, but as a space enthusiast who wants my daughters to see American astronauts walking on the moon. It was the left hand side of that poster that I'm fully supportive of. I'd like nothing more than to see Artemis 2 get around the moon, and again, see Americans walking on the moon. And again, I don't think these are either-or. I mean, NASA is an extraordinary agency that can do the near impossible. We can chart a course for Mars in line with the President's vision to return to the moon before the Chinese can get there, to figure out the space economy, and do the other things, ma'am.

Sen. Cantwell: There's a lot here. So the HiCAM program on thermoplastic composites -- do you support that program at NASA?

Isaacman: I think NASA has the best, brightest, most talented engineers and scientists, and we should be working on cutting edge technology.

Sen. Cantwell: I will want for the record whether you support that. In you know, clarity, not just like, “Hey, I like cutting edge technology.” These are really big decisions that lots of us have already weighed in on, and we just want to know whether they're going to get slashed someday because the President wakes up and says he doesn't want to do it, and whether you're going to say, “Yes, go ahead.”

So, it will take all of us working together. Ms. Trusty, I don't want you to keep going ignored through the conversation. My time has expired. I will want to come back to you on the broadcasters getting more ability in the marketplace, particularly as I mentioned earlier. You want a vibrant news competition, particularly when it comes to local journalism, reopening that case at the FCC, but I will take that coming back on a second round.

And I love that. Senator Wicker thinks that you play chess instead of checkers, because we need a lot more chess playing at the FCC. Thank you.

Q&A Part 2

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, glad I made it back. Ms. Trusty—

Sen. Cruz: I did filibuster a little bit.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. Thank you. I wanted to go back to that virtual multi-channel video programming distribution issue at the FCC. I want to understand whether you think the FCC should re-examine how online platforms negotiate carriage of local news content. I'm concerned that these large platforms, because of the way things have evolved with the network-affiliate relationship resulting in the local broadcasters being left to themselves, and yet they could have some ability -- Right now, I believe local broadcasting is holding us together in a lot of ways.

It's a trusted source of content that people believe in. They believe their local news organization. They think that model probably wouldn't exist if the community didn't believe in the product. And so we don't want to lose that. But as the digital age continues to evolve, and these products and services continue to evolve, like YouTube now being a dominant content distributor, then the ability to negotiate directly with them is a big revenue opportunity, if you will.

So, how do you look at that issue? Do you think that this should be looked at by the FCC and help level the playing field for local journalism?

Trusty: Senator, I do. I think it's extremely important broadcasters provide vital news and information about social and cultural events, educational programming, and information in disasters. And I think it's incumbent upon the FCC to work with Congress to ensure we have a modern regulatory framework that reflects the realities of today's media marketplace, that enables broadcasters to better compete against technology companies for viewers, for ad revenues, for programming, all things that they can generate resources by to reinvest into their news gathering operations and increase the availability of local news.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, and what do you think the best way for -- I think they opened that [proceeding] many years ago and then closed it, then haven't reopened it. Or, actually, technically, I'm not sure about that, you probably know the answer. It's probably like in quasi land, where you could just easily reopen it. Is that right?

Trusty: Well, I think it's still open before the Commission. I'm happy to take a look at it, if confirmed. I know that it's been a question of on your mind for the past couple of FCC nominations hearings, but I think it's an important issue, Senator. I'm happy to take a look at and ask the questions.

Sen. Cantwell: Right. But you think it should be re-looked at?

Trusty: I'm certainly happy to take a look at it.

Sen. Cantwell: Yeah, okay, I'm sure you believe in the First Amendment, I'm sure you believe in not weaponizing, making sure that we have a free press. Back to this broadband issue as we've

continued to allocate resources and look to the FCC. What do you think the best thing the FCC could do now to put more clarity behind the shortfall in [addressing] broadband inequities?

Trusty: So I think when we talk about broadband inequities, I think about affordability and adoption. And so with respect to affordability, I think we can promote more competition, embrace more technologies. I think when you have more choice in the marketplace, that helps to reduce the cost of the service. I also think we can focus on removing regulatory barriers that might impede broadband deployment or raise the cost of broadband deployment. If those regulatory barriers are out of the way, I also think that can reduce costs for consumers.

Of course, we have the Lifeline program as well. So as the Committee is looking at potential reforms to USF, perhaps there's an opportunity to make adjustments to better target those services to communities in need.

I'd also speak to digital literacy programs. I know that the private industry, public interest groups have programs of that sort to help people understand how to maximize the benefit of this technology in their lives

Sen. Cantwell: But what about the mapping? I mean, I think we might probably have even shared with you that Microsoft data that they came up with, which can tell you by household who doesn't have broadband?

Trusty: Absolutely, I think maps are foundational to closing the digital divide, and we have the Broadband Data Act. But of course, there's always room for improvement. So if I'm confirmed, I would welcome the opportunity to work with private sector stakeholders, like your own constituents, to better improve the maps.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I think it could help us elevate a conversation into what are the choices that we could have. If we really understood that people at \$40,000 of income probably aren't buying broadband, which means their kids, from a school perspective and other things, might not be getting the access that we want. And then obviously the impact it has on communities.

And then back to the spectrum, I listened to what you said earlier, even though I've been running in and out at various votes, that you believe that the DoD side of this equation needs to be thought through, that your experience here and then your experience there gave you two different viewpoints on this. How do you think the FCC could best help in resolving this issue? How do we -- let me say it differently.

10 or 15 years ago, we probably would have said the FCC is the undisputed scientific leader. You would go to your [engineers] and you would say, this is what they say about [spectrum] interference, right? But now the world's changed, and we have so much more on the technology front. And now we have agencies disputing each other, right? DOD and FAA, or various things. How do you think you can reassert the FCC scientific leadership on this issue when so much of the conversation ends up downstairs in a secure briefing room?

Trusty: Sure, I appreciate this question. I think this is probably the heart of the issue that engineers don't agree on interference metrics, among other things. So this is where I think the FCC NTIA Memorandum of Understanding could probably come into play.

Sen. Cantwell: The one that they just did, or you mean a new one?

Trusty: Maybe a new one that's updated and reflects some of these other considerations. Maybe we have to hire more engineers and technical people to help address this issue, who have experience in both camps as well. So those are potentially some ideas to address this.

Sen. Cantwell: And then what about the secure nature of this? I'm pretty sure, Mr. Isaacman -- it is interesting that you're here together. It's made it harder for all of us because there's ample questions to ask both of you, but you are an intersection of a very big, important what is not just a communication system, but is a vulnerability for national security if we don't get it right.

And so, I think Mr. Isaacman can tell you how broad he thinks this is going to go in the future, the constellations, not just the LEOs that he's talking about, but how much more of this communication is going to happen through the satellite system, and why we have to have this layer of security. But do you have ideas that you think the FCC could do in listening more to the private a framework by which the private sector and agencies could have more conversations about what the future looks like, and thereby find some more common ground.

Trusty: So, I think this goes back to a conversation we had a little bit earlier about folks having clearances because much of this information is classified or in a special access program, and it's very sensitive. And so, I know that some people in the industry do have clearances, but to the extent we can bring those folks into the same room with federal agencies to have these robust conversations about what the needs and interests are, what the objectives are, to try to find common ground, I think that's the most important thing here.

Sen. Cantwell: I didn't mean to engage you on this, but Mr. Isaacman, do you understand my point that there's so much yet to still happen here? That how do we get the dialog towards the advancements that could happen, when basically everybody needs a national security clearance, and yet, at the same time, give people an understanding of where we could come together. Ms. Trusty, you do support the NTIA's report that DOD and NTIA should look at dynamic spectrum sharing? You do support that?

Trusty: Yes, I think we should be investing in dynamic spectrum sharing technologies.

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, Mr. Isaacman, any thoughts here?

Isaacman: Senator, I wouldn't want to encroach on my nominee's clear command over the spectrum here. I would say, at least with through the lens of NASA, I'm excited about what commercial industry is working on in terms of next generation technology. My most recent mission to space we tested out sending an awful lot of data securely over a laser link, a beam of light. I think that's a great way, at least from NASA's perspective, to not add to the demand problem with respect to the spectrum.

Sen. Cantwell: Well, I do think this will be one of the big challenges we face, if we want this leadership position, how do we think ahead? How do we get this conversation with the private sector, who's really doing a lot of that thinking, but also get the DoD part of it, and then get the dynamic spectrum part of it done correctly?

Okay, well thank you both very much. Mr. Isaacman and Ms. Trusty, I'm going to ask you a final question required of all nominees. If confirmed, do you pledge to work collaboratively with this Committee to provide thorough and timely responses to the Committee's request and appear before the Committee when requested?

Trusty: Yes, Senator.

Isaacman: I do, Senator.

Sen. Cantwell: Thank you. I have letters of support from various organizations for Mr. Isaacman and Ms. Trusty's nomination that I would ask unanimous consent to be inserted into the record. So without objection, so ordered.

Senators will have until the close of business Friday, April 11th to submit questions for the record. These nominees will have until the close of business, Tuesday, April 15th to respond to these questions. I thank Senator Cruz for allowing me to come back and ask these questions. That concludes our hearing today. The Committee stands adjourned.