

Congress extends ISS and tells NASA to get moving on private space stations

Nominally, NASA plans to have one or more of these companies operating a commercial space station in low-Earth orbit by 2030. This is the date at which the US space agency has stated it will retire the aging laboratory, some elements of which are now nearly three decades old. However, some space policy officials have questioned whether any of the companies might be ready by then.

Cruz and other senators on the committee appear to share those concerns, as their legislation extends the International Space Station's lifespan from 2030 to 2032 (an extension must still be approved by international partners, including Russia). Moreover, the authorization bill states, "The Administrator shall not initiate the de-orbit of the ISS until the date on which a commercial low-Earth orbit destination has reached an initial operational capability."

With this legislation, the US Senate is making clear that it views a permanent human presence in low-Earth orbit as a high priority. This version of the authorization legislation must still be passed by the full Senate and work its way through the House of Representatives.

Reaction from the companies

After the legislation passed the Commerce committee, Axiom Space said on social media that it welcomes the changes: "Axiom Space is proud to support the NASA Authorization Act of

2026. The bill is a clear indicator that Chairman @SenTedCruz and the Senate Commerce Committee are determined to ensure the success of the entire human spaceflight enterprise.”

In an interview, the chief executive of Vast, Max Haot, said his company also welcomed the clarifying legislation—both for its language on commercial space stations as well as its reflection of the fact that NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman has been working overtime to set the Artemis lunar program on a better path for success.

“We are really impressed by what Jared has been able to do with the American space program and aligning all of the stakeholders,” he said. “As it relates to commercial space stations, we were happy to see the renewed commitment to transition from the ISS to commercial alternatives.”

Haot said there should not be a hard date for de-orbiting the International Space Station but that it should depend on the readiness of the commercial providers. He said Vast is confident that, should NASA issue an RFP and awards for private providers this year, Vast will be ready to support a continuous human presence in low-Earth orbit by the end of 2030.

<https://arstechnica.com/space/2026/03/congress-steps-up-pressure-on-nasa-to-support-private-space-stations/>