

What's Happening In Space Policy December 6-12, 2020

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Here is SpacePolicyOnline.com's list of space policy events for the week of December 6-12, 2020 and any insight we can offer about them. The House and Senate are in session this week.

During the Week

Another busy week started this morning (Sunday) with the launch of the SpaceX Commercial Resupply Services (CRS)-21, or SpX-21, cargo mission to the International Space Station (ISS). It was supposed to go yesterday, but weather didn't cooperate. Today, it lifted off on time at 11:17 am ET marking the 100th successful launch of Falcon 9. The first stage returned to a landing on a drone ship, completing the fourth use of this particular first stage. As the name suggests, this is SpaceX's 21st cargo mission to ISS, but the first of its new version of Cargo Dragon. Derived from Crew Dragon, it can dock autonomously, rather than berth (where the ISS crew needs to capture it using Canadarm2 and then install it onto a docking port), and be reused five times instead of three. It also can carry more cargo and has 6,400 pounds of supplies and equipment aboard, including the first commercially-provided airlock, the Nanoracks Bishop Airlock. SpX-21 will dock at ISS at 1:30 pm ET tomorrow. NASA TV coverage begins at 11:30 am ET.

Back here on Earth, the government runs out of money at midnight on Friday when the Continuing Resolution (CR) expires. Congress must pass something by then to keep the government operating. It is making progress on the 12 regular appropriations bills, but a short-term (days or a week) extension of the CR seems likely as they finish up.

One reason for the delay is that agreement appears to be close on a new COVID-relief bill and they may add it to the appropriations bill. The House and Senate have been at odds for months on a new COVID bill, with House Democrats insisting on a \$2.2 trillion package that includes aid to state and local governments, while Senate Republicans insist on a much smaller (relatively speaking) \$500 billion deal. Last week, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi relented and agreed to back a \$908 billion bipartisan package that's circulating on the Hill. Her change of heart came after President-elect Joe Biden made it clear his priority is getting at least something to help people

and businesses, even if it's not everything Democrats want, and address the rest after he's in office.

It's not a done deal yet — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and President Trump have not publicly signed off — but pressure is mounting from other Republicans as COVID cases spike and restrictions on businesses are reimposed. Hopefully we'll see an agreement this week that also triggers final decisions on appropriations. In meantime, as we said, a short term CR extension seems likely.

We always caution, however, that trying to anticipate congressional action is a risky business and no where was that more evident in the past couple of days than on the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). Last week it seemed a long shot, at best, that the House and Senate would reach a compromise this year because of Trump's threats to veto the bill if it required the renaming of military facilities currently named after Confederate soldiers or did not repeal a completely unrelated provision of a law (Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act) that protects Internet companies from liability for content posted by others.

But last Thursday, the House and Senate Armed Services Committees (HASC and SASC) suddenly announced they had agreed on a final version of the bill. We **summarized** its space-related provisions that day.

HASC and SASC are very proud that despite all the political turmoil over all the decades since the first NDAA was passed in 1961, they have always found a way to get the job done. In the words of SASC Chairman Jim Inhofe (R-OK) and Ranking Member Jack Reed (D-RI), the NDAA “fulfills our most important constitutional duty: to provide for the security of this nation and the men and women who lay their lives on the line to defend it.”

The compromise came after Senate Republicans relented because authorizing funding and setting policy for the country's national defense outweighed the President's objections to renaming military installations and the non-germane Internet dispute. Inhofe, one of the President's closest allies on Capitol Hill, issued a statement after Trump slammed him on Twitter and renewed the veto threat, saying that while he completely agreed with the President substantively on both issues, they could not be allowed to derail the entire NDAA.

We will see what the President does when it reaches his desk, perhaps this week. The bill enjoys broad bipartisan support and might pass both chambers with a veto-proof majority, but voting to override a veto is a different political calculus than voting to support a bill. Although Trump no longer will be president after January 20, he is expected to remain a powerful figure in Republican politics and voting to override his veto could have ramifications in the future. But the fact that Inhofe is putting it all on the line could be persuasive.

The bill, H.R. 6395, is named in honor of Rep. Mac Thornberry, by the way. He is the top Republican on HASC, and a former chairman, who is retiring at the end of this Congress.

Off the Hill, the big event this week is the 8th meeting of the White House National Space Council at Kennedy Space Center on Wednesday. Vice President Mike Pence, who chairs the Council, put out a statement that he will deliver remarks on the Artemis program “and the

historic space accomplishments of the Trump Administration.” It will be broadcast on NASA TV. **Earlier this year**, Scott Pace, Executive Secretary of the Council and Deputy Assistant to the President, said they were working on a new version of the 2010 National Space Policy, so it would not be surprising if that is one of the topics to be discussed.

There’s so much else going on this week that we barely have time to mention just a few: the next “hop” of SpaceX’s Starship, which was expected last week, but slipped into this week and could happen as soon as tomorrow; an American National Standards Institute (ANSI) meeting tomorrow on setting voluntary standards for Space Situational Awareness and orbital debris; an Aviation Week webinar on Tuesday morning on “New Era of Human Spaceflight?”; a Cato Institute webinar at noon on Tuesday questioning whether Space Force is ahead of its time; another Tuesday webinar, this one in mid-afternoon, by the Secure World Foundation on its new report full of **space policy recommendations for the incoming Biden Administration**; the second week of the American Geophysical Union (AGU) fall meeting; and the European Union’s European Space Week.

That’s just the tip of the iceberg. Those and other events we know about as of Sunday morning are shown below. Check back throughout the week for others we learn about later or for updates to these that we post to our **Calendar**.