

Maryland's Mission for Space: We Must Do the Hard Things, Together
Kevin F. Kelly Remarks to the Maryland Space Business Roundtable
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Good afternoon. Thank you Marisa for that kind introduction.

It's an honor to be with you today. I came to my first Maryland Space Business Roundtable lunch in 1992. I was a young Appropriations Committee clerk, accompanying Senator Barbara Mikulski for her first of many great speeches at this forum.

Since this is the Roundtable's pre-Thanksgiving lunch, I'd like to tell you whom I'm thankful for. I'm thankful for Senator Mikulski, who is the godmother of the Maryland space industry and who gave me the chance to be a part of it. I'm thankful for Maryland's Congressional Delegation, especially Senators Van Hollen and Alsobrooks, Congressmen Glenn Ivey and Steny Hoyer, and our newest House member, Sarah Elfreth. They are fighting every day against some fierce headwinds.

I'm thankful for seven decades of industry, government and non-profit leaders - who have protected and developed the Maryland space ecosystem. And today, I'm happy to add to the list, I'm thankful that the government shutdown is almost over.

When I think about the Maryland space community system during all these decades, I think of its two fundamental qualities: brilliance and perseverance. We need those qualities now, as much as ever, because: Greenbelt, we have a problem.

Over the next few minutes, I want to offer three ideas to launch a new conversation about the problem and remind us why what you do here matters.

We all know the problem. The Trump Administration's FY 2026 budget reads like a going-out-of-business plan for the Maryland space community. It would cut civil space science almost in half. More than 50 operating missions — many with Maryland's intellectual fingerprints—would be turned off. And it proposes a divorce between NASA Goddard and NOAA in building future weather satellites.

So, what do we do?

I like to recall the words President Kennedy said at Rice University. "We choose to go to the moon . . . and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard . . ."

Space is hard work. And the politics of space is even harder.

But is this the worst it's ever been? No, it's not. To paraphrase another space hero, Spock in *Star Trek VI*, "We have been dead before."

Do you remember?

- Hubble's spherical aberration.
- The 1995 proposal to close Goddard.
- A year later, the attempt to cancel the Earth Observing System.
- The 2003 effort to kill New Horizons and Parker Solar Probe.
- The final Hubble servicing mission left for dead in 2004 – and the overruns that nearly ended Webb altogether, twice in the decade after 2010.

Each time, Team Maryland fought its way back -- and did not only the hard, but amazing things:

- Five Hubble servicing missions whose instruments re-wrote our understanding of the universe.
- The James Webb Space Telescope, a cathedral of optics and patience whose scientific greatness will surpass Hubble's.
- The Discovery and New Frontiers programs that changed planetary exploration, giving us more science for less money.
- The EOS era
- The Landsat dynasty
- And three decades of weather satellites.

And who did all those hard things? The people in this room and those who came before you – the phenomenal human constellation that shines here.

You are the Force that turned a flawed telescope that was derided as a “techno turkey” into the most productive space science instrument in history. You designed and flew missions that touched the Sun. You imagined and built a telescope that lives a million miles away and can see galaxies forming just after God winked and gave us the Big Bang.

This isn't nostalgia about the glory days: It's proof of concept. When they try to pronounce us for dead, let's remember: Maryland's mastery of space exploration and science is far from death. In fact, it's a renewable resource.

We are hearing some good news through faint signals that the House may reverse some of the Administration's proposed cuts. Under the leadership of Senator Van Hollen, the Senate would go much further – to restore full funding for space science; to invest in Landsat, weather satellites, heliophysics, APL's DragonFly mission and the Habitable Worlds Observatory. There's even early funding for the next planetary flagship, which could be built on the East Coast.

The Senate approach would keep the Maryland space industry alive, with a rocket-propelled political and financial boost. Yet, the hard things remain. We'll face proposed cuts over and over again. These fights will be long and exhausting.

But I have three ideas on how we can prevail. Anyone who knows me, knows that behind each idea are at least three sub-ideas, and of course, a future white paper. I'd like to go through these details, but you probably want to finish lunch before it's time for dinner. So, instead, I'll offer these ideas in brief and, I hope, launch us into a new conversation.

First Idea: Seize the Opportunity of New National Priorities.

There is a treasure map in the Administration's FY 2027 Research and Development priorities memo – national requirements uniquely suited to Maryland.

The priorities include National Security Space, Planetary Defense, and Space Weather -- and we are already ahead here:

- APL flew DART, the first true planetary defense test.
- Team Maryland just launched iMAP; and
- Goddard is flying the MMS spacecraft, which is unlocking magnetic reconnection, a key phenomenon we must understand for the Golden Dome to work.

The priorities memo emphasizes Dynamic Space Operations – exploring and operating in space.

- And we're already here, too: Goddard's on-orbit satellite servicing sets the stage for developing this capability, preparing Maryland for this new space operations requirement.
- OSAM is not out yet; keep a candle in the window for OSAM.

The priorities memo also includes cislunar space. Maryland's capabilities here are underappreciated:

- APL has led a consortium that's given NASA a technology roadmap for lunar surface and cislunar exploration.
- And Maryland's capacity here is growing, with companies like Intuitive Machines, that is building new payloads in Maryland that will fly and land on the moon late next year.
- The reset of Artemis is an opportunity for Maryland, and we should claim a greater share of the work here.

Second Idea: Maryland must reclaim the neighborhood and compete for space investment.

- Maryland has three pretty important neighbors: the U.S. Space Force, the IC and the NSA are within driving distance. This proximity is a comparative and cost advantage. We need to seize this and win work in national security space.
- While we pay more attention to our neighbors, our state and local governments must create incentives for private sector investment. Commercial space companies are moving to Texas, Florida, Alabama, and even Oklahoma and New Mexico because -they follow the money. They go where they are wanted and valued.
- It's time for frank conversations between the Roundtable, the General Assembly and the Governor about how we pull together to retain and grow the juggernaut of Space jobs, science and prestige.

My third and final idea -- and, if we don't do this hard thing -- the others won't really matter: We need to be All for One and One for All.

Maryland must not face the future as a collection of disconnected organizations. United we stand, divided we fall. Yes, there always will be corporate, institutional and scientific competition. That's healthy, but we can also keep it from being destructive.

Roles will evolve. Sacred assumptions may not survive. And we can believe that, as we pull together, there will be new work to meet both civil and defense space priorities, and work assigned on merit. A test case for this new paradigm could help answer the question "Are we Alone" through the Habitable Worlds Observatory.

Who better than Team Maryland to develop a new model of management that incorporates the lessons learned from Hubble, Webb and Roman? And set a fixed date for launch for no later than a ten years from now. To thrive in the future, we must read the signs of the times. Merit, versus longevity, must win out.

In closing, we can be thankful, and celebrate what Maryland has to offer, because:

- If America is going to beat China in the innovation race;
- If America is going to remain safe and secure from our enemies;
- And if America is going to safeguard our planet and search for life beyond Earth, America will need Maryland, and Maryland at its best.
- America will need Maryland to do the hard things, together.

And yes, we can. Thank you again for inviting me, and I look forward to the conversation.