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# ASCENDxTexas

## INTERACTIVE SESSION DETAILED SUMMARY

SESSION DATE:  
**27 February 2025**

COMPILED BY:  
**ASCENDxTexas Interactive Session Team**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

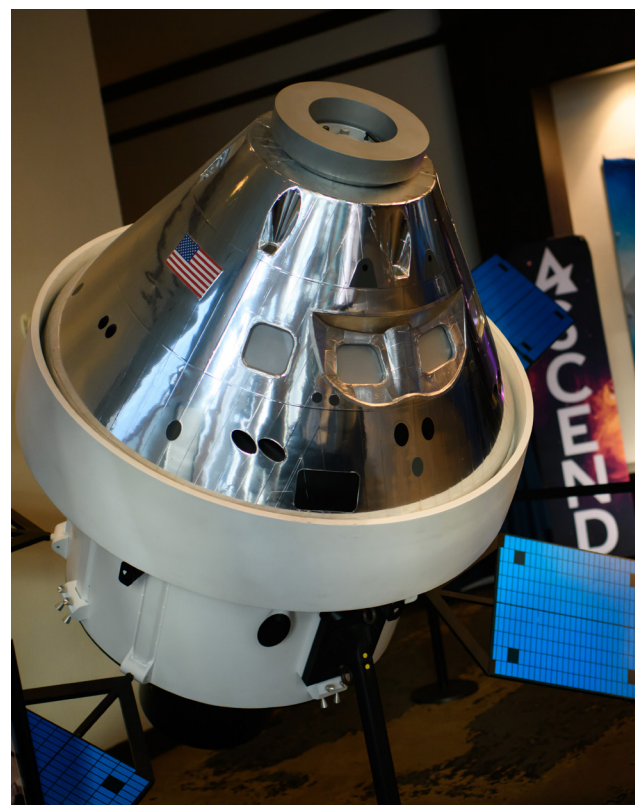
The fourth annual ASCENDxTexas, held 26–27 February, examined the theme, Strategic Transitions — Aligning Stakeholders for Giant Leaps, which focused on the innovation and adaptation necessary to navigate the evolving space economy. The event served as a collaborative hub, fostering partnerships and overcoming barriers to build transformative outcomes and to catalyze a new era of the space economy. The interactive session was an opportunity for the community to discuss key drivers, trends, and forces to the current climate of the space ecosystem. During the session we collected inputs from 450+ participants in a townhall-style forum.

This summary does not represent the perspective of any one individual or organization but rather is a compilation of many different viewpoints from participants who attended 2025 ASCENDxTexas.

# 1 GOVERNMENT STRATEGIC VISION & DIRECTION SUMMARY

**QUESTION: When you look at politics, how is it shaping your business decisions? We are talking about federal, state, and local governments.**

- › **Questions about the current administration's priorities:** There are questions surrounding changes brought on by the new administration, particularly regarding NASA's direction, international partnerships, and regulatory policies. Multiple sources mention that the administration's policies cause uncertainty. One participant said, "Political uncertainty and change makes it difficult to invest (both funds and time)."
- › **Need for clear guidance on human exploration destinations (moon versus Mars):** The industry seeks clear direction from government leadership regarding long-term goals for human space exploration, specifically whether the focus should be on the moon or Mars. Without this, it becomes more difficult to justify the cost of commercial missions and partnerships.
- › **Desire for increased government-industry partnership:** Participants emphasized the need for stronger collaboration between the government and the private sector to unlock new business opportunities, particularly in microgravity research and related fields.
- › **Fear of partisan rhetoric and polarization:** There's a desire to depoliticize space exploration and foster a collaborative, nonpartisan environment. One participant noted, "Space isn't partisan, how do we get it out of partisan rhetoric?"
- › **NASA's role and funding:** Uncertainty regarding NASA's direction is causing industry actors to become uncertain how to "determine how much to invest in NASA projects." It was mentioned several times in the social Q&A that many parties are concerned with budget decisions, and what projects will be focused on going forward.





# 2 ECONOMIC FACTORS & FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS SUMMARY

**QUESTION: What questions are you asking yourself that involve economic trends and factors?**

- › **Impact of tariffs and supply chain disruptions:** Tariffs on materials and supply chain availability are significant concerns, particularly for companies with fixed-price contracts.
- › **Challenges in government contracting:** Uncertainty in government contracting makes it difficult for businesses to develop long-range plans, forcing a focus on near-term changes.
- › **Loss of institutional knowledge:** The potential loss of institutional knowledge from furloughing government employees who do not find private sector jobs will slow down space economy development.
- › **Commercial viability of CLDs (Commercial LEO Destinations):** There are concerns about the business models for CLDs, particularly if the ISS is terminated prematurely. One respondent asked, “What happens to ISS transition to CLDs if ISS is retired in 2027?”



# 3 TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS & REGULATORY HURDLES SUMMARY

**QUESTION: What technological changes or advances influence your decisions and how are you answering those changes?**

- › **AI's potential and the need for trust and security:** AI is seen as a “potential game changer,” but there's a strong emphasis on ensuring AI systems are trusted, secure, and regulated appropriately. There is a push for federal guidelines and guardrails for federal AI practices.
- › **ITAR and export control challenges:** ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulations) continues to be a major concern for international collaboration. Participants want easier initiation and compliance with ITAR and EAR (Export Administration Regulations), for example, through international audits. A potential path would be to make it easier to achieve and sustain trade compliance.
- › **ISRU (In-Situ Resource Utilization) and technology demonstration missions:** There's a push for technology demonstration missions to prove the viability of using resources found on the moon and other celestial bodies.
- › **Standardization & Information Integrity:** Emphasis on the need for standardized approaches to engineering projects. The need for data integrity is more important than ever.
- › **Quantum Technology:** A major component of technological advancement is the increased use of quantum computers. IBM, Google, and Microsoft have made major strides in quantum computing.





# 4 SOCIAL INFLUENCES & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

KEY THEMES &  
SUMMARY

## QUESTION: How are social influences shaping your business decisions?

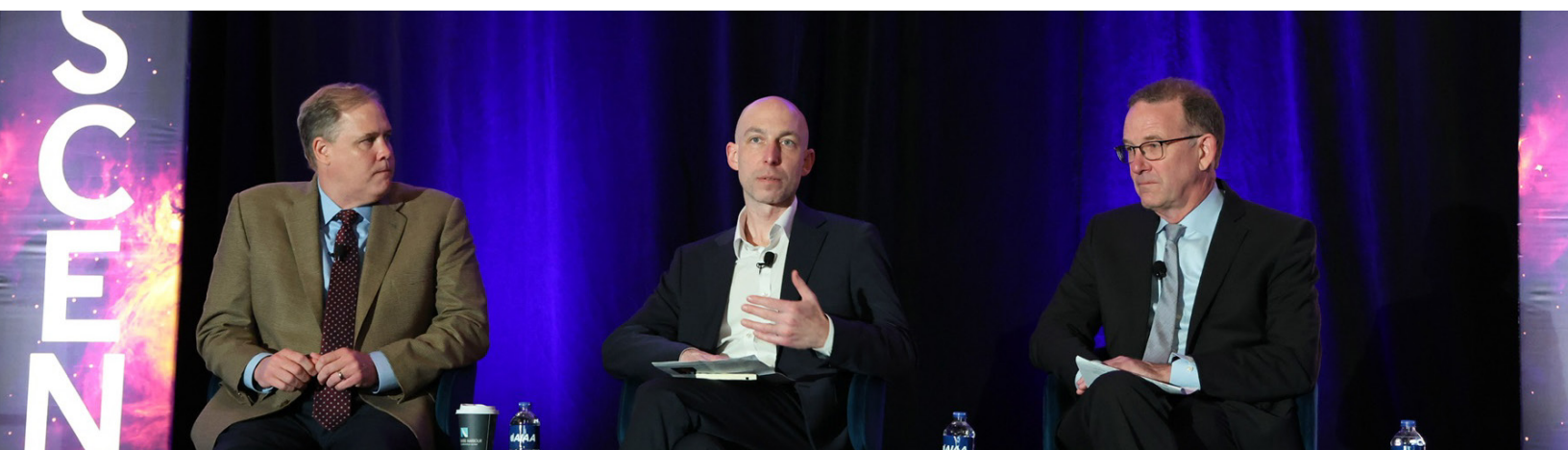
- › **Recruiting the next generation:** Companies and governments face difficulties recruiting young talent due to competing companies and sectors and a limited number of STEM graduates.
- › **Negative societal pressures:** Science has, alarmingly, “become almost a dirty word in the current environment.”
- › **Balancing collaboration and competition:** The private sector must balance competition and working together.
- › **The public is important:** People are still looking for “more interpersonal, relations-based interactions.”



# 5 LEGAL & POLICY FRAMEWORKS SUMMARY

**QUESTION: How are legal influences and drivers impacting your decision-making process?**

- › **Regulatory lag on new technologies:** Policy and regulatory institutions often lag behind technological advancements, creating uncertainty and hindering innovation.
- › **IP and data rights:** NASA's claims on intellectual property are seen by some as diluting the business case for investment in new technologies. There are debates about the government owning all the data rights.
- › **Need for “stop-gap laws” and regulations:** Participants spoke on the need to regulate new technological developments.
- › **Views on antitrust laws:** The new administration's view on antitrust laws may have an effect on the industry.
- › **Defunct assets in space:** It is important to clarify the salvageability of old assets in space.





# 6 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS SUMMARY

## QUESTION: How are environmental influences and drivers impacting your decision-making process?

- › **Protecting the lunar environment:** The industry wants to ensure that the lunar environment is protected before it becomes a problem.
- › **Space debris and sustainability:** Space debris remains a major concern. Sustainability must get factored in to avoid the accumulation of space debris.
- › **Impact of launch cadence:** There is a concern that rapid launch cadence of reusable launch vehicles will run into regulations, but many parties recognize the benefit of reusable launch vehicles.
- › **Environmental impact on Texas:** It is important to know how the Texas power grid will be able to handle future possibilities.



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