

By Kevin McCarthy January 24, 2012 [Link](#)

Ridgecrest, Calif. — Eight years ago, I witnessed firsthand the beginning of a new space age right here in Kern County: the era of private spaceflight. Thousands flocked to Mojave to watch SpaceShipOne, the first privately manned spacecraft, soar into the heavens and return safely back to Earth. Today, SpaceShipOne hangs in the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum as another reminder of Mojave's impact on aerospace history.

The Mojave Air and Space Port has led the way in cutting-edge aerospace innovation, and is home to a thriving private commercial space industry that was born from the Ansari X-Prize. Companies like Virgin Galactic, Scaled Composites, the Spaceship Company, XCOR, Masten Space Systems and Firestar have racked up a list of "firsts" known around the globe. These "firsts" are having a tangible impact on our economy today.

Currently, the Space Port is at 100 percent capacity with a quarter of all jobs there in the private commercial space industry. And this is just the beginning. More jobs are coming. Just last month, a new commercial space flight venture was formed: Stratolaunch Systems. The brainchild of Paul Allen and Burt Rutan, Stratolaunch Systems aims to build a major portion of its new space delivery system at Mojave. It's clear that the private sector is ready and willing to step up to keep America at the forefront of space flight.

But that's also where things can get tricky. The business owners and innovators in our community are well aware of the government's affinity to regulate just for the sake of regulating. Fortunately, in 2004, common sense legislation regarding the regulation of commercial space flight was passed that gave the industry room to innovate and grow while also protecting the safety of crew members and the public. This is an example of government allowing the private sector to do what it does best: innovate and create new technologies. However, the legislation is slated to expire at the end of this year, and that could mean a whole slew of new regulations on the growing \$34 billion commercial space flight industry.

There is no question that the safety of crew members and the public is of utmost importance, but unleashing Washington bureaucrats on this industry now could mean the end of private commercial space flight in America before it even gets off the ground. That is why I am fighting to extend the 2004 provisions.

The successes witnessed and the jobs already created are just a glimpse into the full economic and technological possibilities of private commercial space flight. And I will keep fighting to allow this industry to reach its potential and see more good jobs created right here in our backyard