

By Gautham Nagesh February 8, 2012

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The first long-term funding bill for the Federal Aviation Administration was welcomed Tuesday by the Commercial Spaceflight Federation, which said it will bring much-needed regulatory stability to the growing industry.

"Yesterday marks a major milestone for the Commercial Spaceflight Federation," said Chairman Eric Anderson. "This will help initiate a new wave of job creation and private investment in the industry."

The bill headed to President Obama's desk would extend the regulatory "learning period" for commercial space providers to allow for several more years of flight testing for human spaceflight vehicles.

"By extending the learning period, we're opening the door for continued growth and job creation, while also helping keep America at the forefront of space travel and exploration. I look forward to seeing what comes next from this burgeoning industry," said House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.).

The learning period allows commercial space companies to test new system without worrying about certain safety regulations. Due to delays in the development of the technology, it's taken longer than expected for test flights with humans.

The learning period was originally slated to expire in December but has been pushed back to October 2015, when the funding bill expires. The Obama administration has focused on funding the private space industry over NASA's human spaceflight program, but no commercial manned flights have taken place yet.

"This provision keeps the industry on a path similar to the initial pioneering days of aviation, in which airplane designers were able to innovate and pursue differing approaches that continued to move the industry forward while rapidly developing safety improvements," added Commercial Spaceflight Federation executive director Alexander Saltman.

"Safety is the highest priority for the commercial space industry; this includes both the safety of the pioneering customers and all those who follow."