

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 28, 2025

The Honorable Troy Meink
Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Meink,

We write to you today to emphasize the need to accelerate the modernization of federal launch ranges. As you know, the United States' assured access to space is foundational to national security. With launch demand surging across military, intelligence, and civil programs, it is essential that legacy infrastructure like Space Launch Complex 37 (SLC-37) is efficiently modernized to support next-generation systems. Today, SLC-37 sits idle despite being one of the few pads on the Eastern Range that has been historically used for heavy lift launch. We applaud the Department's decision to move forward with the demolition of retired infrastructure at this site under the Categorical Exclusion (CATEX). We respectfully request the Department to approve new construction to support next-generation heavy lift launch capability as quickly as possible.

To meet urgent national security and space access needs, we urge the Department of the Air Force (DAF) to immediately apply its CATEX to authorize construction of the core launch structures needed to return SLC-37 to operational readiness. We feel that the proposed work falls squarely within the CATEX adopted by DAF in 2024, which covers "new construction that is like or compatible with existing land use."¹ SLC-37 for decades has served as a heavy lift launch site, and the new construction is consistent in type, scale, and environmental impact with prior activities at comparable sites. DAF has previously issued Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for materially similar construction at SLC-41 and Patrick Space Force Base.² NASA, likewise, reached similar conclusions in its 2021 Environmental Assessment for the 66-acre Exploration Park North project at Kennedy Space Center.³ In addition, DAF adopted the Navy's CATEX to "enhance mission capabilities and effectiveness, improve safety and increase operational efficiencies," which applies to construction consistent with existing land use and infrastructure scale.

In our opinion, the SLC-37 project clearly meets these standards. We fear that delaying construction until completion of the lease Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will impose a procedural barrier that serves no environmental benefit while also undermining the agency's ability to deliver mission-critical infrastructure on a timely basis. Moreover, the Executive Branch, Supreme Court, and Congress on a bipartisan basis have all made clear that NEPA must not be used to delay mission-critical infrastructure. The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 reaffirmed agencies' authority to use CATEXs as a primary tool where agencies may determine that additional environmental review is unwarranted.⁴ Executive Order 14154 instructs agencies to prioritize "efficiency and certainty" over process for its own sake.⁵ The Supreme Court's 2025 decision in *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County* confirmed that NEPA is procedural only and that courts must defer to reasonable agency determinations on review scope.⁶

¹ <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/11/25/2024-27545/notice-of-adoption-of-categorical-exclusions-under-the-national-environmental-policy-act>

² https://www.nasa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/final_vulcan_ea_and_fonsi_2019.pdf;
https://www.patrick.spaceforce.mil/Portals/14/2025_Draft%20SpaceX_Falcon%209%20FONSI%20SLC-40.pdf

³ https://netpublic.grc.nasa.gov/main/ExpParkNorth_FINAL%20EA%2007-27-21.pdf

⁴ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/3746/summary/00>

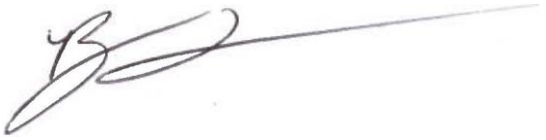
⁵ <https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2025-01956.pdf>

⁶ https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/24pdf/23-975_m648.pdf

Finally, we note that new construction is independent of the pending lease EIS. No future user, government or commercial, can operate from SLC-37 without construction of upgraded facilities. Authorizing construction now does not dictate or constrain any future use decision. Instead, it enables DAF to reclaim strategic infrastructure in a timely, lawful, and environmentally responsible manner, exactly as envisioned by recent reforms to NEPA.

We respectfully request your assistance and support to return SLC-37 to operational readiness and continue American dominance in space. We thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BD', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Byron Donalds
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ashley Moody'.

Ashley Moody
United States Senator