

Space no longer the final frontier

Summit brings together industry leaders to talk about ‘central nervous system’ of civilization

By Scott Bordow, ASU News
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As the Aerospace and Defense Summit got underway on May 15 in Los Angeles, the purpose of the summit was made abundantly clear.

“Space is no longer the frontier,” said Anna Magzanyan, president of LA Times Studios and NantStudios, both Los Angeles Times Media Group companies. “It is the infrastructure. It is the backbone of our communication, our commerce and our national security.”

The Times Media Group and Arizona State University co-hosted the summit that united key policymakers, defense leaders and innovators in the space industry, which, according to the event page on the LA Times website, has become the “central nervous system of modern civilization.”

“Think about all the systems that we take for granted each and every day,” said Sally Morton, executive vice president and chief research and innovation officer for ASU’s Knowledge Enterprise.

“Our global financial markets, our transportation and logistics chains, our ability to connect to others. These systems are reliant on our space communication networks.”

Morton said holding the summit at NantStudios, a virtual production company located in El Segundo, California, and having ASU as a summit partner was apropos because NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory is located in California, and ASU is working with the United States government and industry leaders to ensure research and development can make its way onto the launchpad.

“Arizona and California are at the heart of this space renaissance,” Morton said.

Morton also noted that the [ASU California Center](#) is located in downtown Los Angeles. California is home to more than 100,000 students who have enrolled in ASU programs over the past 25 years.

The summit featured several panel discussions, video remarks from Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly, and a conversation between ASU President Michael Crow and Patrick Soon-Shiong, founder and executive chairman of biotechnology company ImmunityBio and owner of the Los Angeles Times.

Crow asked Soon-Shiong how people can benefit from the economic progress being made by companies in the aerospace and defense industry. Soon-Shiong said more summits and discussions that bring together leaders in those industries are imperative, and he also praised ASU's School of Earth and Space Exploration for supporting innovative companies in the industry.

"The most innovative universities truly change the course of not only how students are taught, but worldwide learning," Soon-Shiong said. "I wish that most university presidents would really follow Michael's lead. He has really perfected teaching and training and thinking in a way that is unprecedented."

Morton, who moderated a panel discussion on workforce development, said educational institutions like ASU must train students to think across different fields rather than being stuck in traditional disciplines, and produce graduates who "can deliver skills that our space industry needs now and in the future."

Elena Rocchi, a clinical professor in The Design School at ASU and head of the Master of Science in design program with a concentration in space architecture and extreme environments, said that education should start in K-12 schools.

Rocchi said she's working with the Limitless Space Institute on a yearlong professional development program that trains educators across Brazil to teach beyond standard curriculum using space exploration.

"We are working with kids and teachers to actually design environments for Mars," Rocchi said. "(The students) are actually starting to think, 'I can be an astronaut. I can be a space architect.'"

Laurie Leshin, University Professor for Space Futures at ASU and former director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, was the keynote speaker in the afternoon session and said training and technology needs a third leg for the space industry to thrive. She described it as FITS: frictionless innovation and translation at scale.

Leshin said the space industry needs to move away from being a government-owned system with antiquated procurement rules to a nimbler industry that can turn research and development into practical uses.

"We have to move faster and we have to move smarter," Leshin said. "I think we should all be thinking about what are some new models of how we can have lots of individual innovation, but bringing it together to make sure that it crosses the finish line and is strongly supported."

Universities like ASU can play a critical role in the process, she said, noting how ASU has become a foundational anchor in the microelectronics industry with facilities like MacroTechnology Works that allow faculty, students and industry partners to collaborate on research and development and pilot manufacturing.

"Imagine something like this for development, quickly prototyping and flight of space technology," Leshin said. "Could we do it? I think we can."

In his remarks, Kelly said the space industry is at an inflection point. Countries like China, Kelly said, are investing aggressively in advanced aerospace capabilities, understanding that "whoever leads in space will help define the future global economy and the future security environment."

“The question for us,” Kelly added, “is whether the United States is prepared to meet that challenge.”

Kelly said the U.S. must meet four challenges:

Sustain federal investment in research and development and breakthrough technologies

Strengthen the pipeline of talent entering the aerospace workforce: “That means supporting STEM education and investing in research institutions like ASU, ensuring that students see a future for themselves in science, engineering, high-end manufacturing and national security,” he said.

Build smarter partnerships between government and the private sector

Strengthen the domestic industrial base

“The supply chain vulnerabilities we’ve seen in recent years should be a wake-up call,” Kelly said. “If we want to maintain leadership in aerospace and defense, critical technologies and manufacturing capabilities need to remain here in the United States.”

The challenge is clear, Kelly said. So is the promise.

“If we can get this next chapter right,” Kelly said, “it can continue to strengthen our economy, our national security and our leadership around the world for decades to come.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Laurie Leshin, University Professor for Space Futures at ASU and former director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, presented a keynote talk at the Aerospace and Defense Summit held in Los Angeles on May 15. Photo by Dania Maxwell

Text image(s)



ASU President Michael Crow (left) greets Patrick Soon-Shiong, founder and executive chairman of ImmunityBio and owner of the Los Angeles Times, during the Aerospace and Defense Summit held in Los Angeles on May 15. The event was co-hosted by ASU and the Los Angeles Times Media Group. Photo by Dania Maxwell



Sally Morton (left), executive vice president in ASU's Knowledge Enterprise, spoke on a panel about the role education and workforce development plays in supporting the U.S. aerospace industry at the inaugural Aerospace and Defense Summit in Los Angeles on May 15. She was joined onstage by Anna Sophia Kulenguski, ASU planetary sciences PhD candidate (center), and Elena Rocchi, clinical professor in The Design School at ASU. Photo by Dania Maxwell