Dr. Chris Scolese
WSBR Roundtable – Opening Remarks
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Moderator: Rob Scheige / Vice President, WSBR

Good afternoon everybody. Thanks for having me.

A lot of you out there know “about” the NRO, but not everybody knows exactly what we do.

The NRO turns 60 in about six weeks, so I want to spend a little time on our history. But I want to spend more time looking ahead.

When the NRO was formed in 1961, the U.S. already had a very clear understanding that our modern way of life— our economy, our military and our national security— would hinge upon our access to, and freedom to operate in space. Since then, NRO’s mission has been to maintain and expand our intelligence advantage in space, to protect and defend the United States.

For six decades running, we’ve done just that, by providing the greatest ISR imagery and data on the planet. On any given day, we service about a half-million users across government, including DoD, every IC agency, a couple dozen domestic agencies, policy-makers, decision-makers, and most importantly, we provide direct support for our warfighters.

But right now, the U.S. is locked in a power competition, in a very strategic environment, where an incredible amount of time and resources

are being expended trying to threaten or challenge our operational advantage in space, and the capabilities we provide.

Here's what we know…

- We know China and Russia are investing heavily in counter-space capabilities— newer and better assets, and more weaponry. Their large-scale, rapid buildup might be the worst-kept secret in recent memory.
- And we know why they're engaged in this competition: a commanding position in space is critical to their economic, diplomatic, and military interests.

That's where we are. Here's where we're going…

NRO will continue to be a cornerstone in our Nation's strategic and operational upper-hand in space, through **unrivaled situational awareness and intelligence through the best imagery and signals data on the planet**.

But to do that, **we have to accelerate and we have to improve**. There's no one-size-fits-all approach to counter the threats we're facing.

We're making architectural changes to improve resiliency, increase capacity and capabilities, and assure the delivery of NRO mission-essential functions. This is our "diversified" architecture— made up of national and commercial satellites, large and small constellations, across multiple orbits.

We have to continue leveraging the commercial industry. Commercial partners now provide imagery as a service, which allows us to

focus on the difficult tasks. In some cases, we can buy entire systems, and adopt or adapt them for our own purposes.

Commercial capabilities, like launch, production spacecraft and computing, have allowed us to move faster and reduce cost.

We have to continue the evolution of our acquisition process. **NRO is known across government to for our ability to reduce traditionally lengthy development cycles. This has allowed us to explore unique capabilities to meet our mission needs.**

Through programs like our Director's Innovation Initiative, we're actively seeking out new suppliers, cutting edge technologies and high payoff concepts across the entire spectrum of capabilities. This approach has already given us opportunities to explore applications for A-I and machine-learning, experiment with prototypes, and develop diverse and more efficient ways of distributing data.

Finally, **we have to continue the evolution and diversification of our workforce**. I can't commend our people enough. We had a record year during the pandemic and our capabilities didn't waver. But we're not doing our job if we're not doing more to canvass, recruit, develop, train and equip the next generation to stand-up and take their place among us. **New voices lead to new insights, and new ideas.** We have to challenge our knowledge base, and we have to make a deliberate commitment to support our growth.

These priorities, along with our continued partnerships across industry and international partners, will allow us to continue leading the way

in the space domain, and keep delivering what we have for 60 years running.

Before I turn it back over for questions, I want to congratulate Jeff Bezos and the Blue Origin team for their successful launch and landing down in West Texas. We had folks all across the building gathered around TVs, watching it live. All of us at NRO hope it’s the first of many successful flights to come.

Rob?