History of the US Commercial Launch Industry

The Soviet’s launch of Sputnik 1 challenged the US and pushed them to establish NASA which would be the competition to the Soviet Union. NASA and the Soviet Union competed to achieve human spaceflight, and the race was won by the Soviets in 1961. NASA expanded its efforts with Project Gemini and Apollo and became the first to send man to the moon, but manned spaceflights were shut down in 1972.

The US Department of Defense (DOD), a new race began to determine who would carry the payloads to the ISS. This spurred competition in the industry to create ELVs (Expendable launch vehicles) capable enough. Following a shuttle disaster, policies were changed to no longer allow the shuttles to transport astronauts from the US to the ISS.

In the United States, an organization called ULA rose to be a monopoly while other countries had their own. The monopoly was growing a lot, hence, NASA launched the COTS program to subsidize the development of private launch vehicles.