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# ATHENS BANNER-HERALD

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## Privatizing space brings complications



In 2025, during a public dispute over government contracts and regulatory matters, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk briefly threatened to decommission the Dragon spacecraft – the vehicle NASA relies on to transport astronauts to orbit, seen here on the launch pad at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station on Feb. 12.

JIM WATSON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

### Relying too heavily on one company can create risks

**Svetla Ben-Itzhak**  
Johns Hopkins University  
THE CONVERSATION

Private companies are no longer peripheral participants in U.S. space activities. They provide key services, including launching and deploying satellites, transporting cargo and astronauts to the International Space Station, and even sending landers to the moon.

Commercial integration is now embedded in U.S. space policy and shapes national space strategy. As someone who studies space and international security, I have watched the extraordinary rise of commercial space with awe – and with growing concerns about the structural vulnerabilities it creates.

Access to space, particularly for crewed missions, remains heavily concentrated in one company, SpaceX. While the United States has begun developing alternatives, in operational reality that concentration gives the company disproportionate leverage. If private power and public strategy were to diverge, would Washington have a credible Plan B?

#### Commercial integration is now official policy

On Feb. 4, the House Science Committee approved the NASA Reauthorization Act of 2026, directing the agency to partner with American commercial providers for operations in low-Earth orbit, lunar landings and the transition beyond the International Space Station. In critical areas such as lunar landers, the bill requires NASA to work with at least two commercial providers – a deliberate effort to avoid dependence on a single company.

President Donald Trump's December 2025 executive order expressed similar preference for prioritizing commercial solutions in federal space activities and set a goal of attracting at least \$50 billion in additional private investment in space by 2028.

The U.S. Space Force's 2024 Commercial Space Strategy also emphasizes speed and innovation through

See **SPACE**, Page 3A



Julie Olson-Buchanan, left, and her daughter Beth, during a happy moment in their lives. Beth, a UGA student, died in a fatal crash in 2023 in Barrow County.

PROVIDED BY BUCHANAN FAMILY

## Manhunt suspect owes \$56M in death of student

**Wayne Ford**  
Athens Banner-Herald  
USA TODAY NETWORK

An Athens judge ruled this week that a man, who is the object of a nearly three-year-long manhunt, owes a family \$56.5 million.

Clarke County State Court Judge Charles E. Auslander issued an order on March 25 that Cesar Raudales Macias is civilly liable for the death of Beth Buchanan, a doctoral student at the University of Georgia who was killed Feb. 13, 2023, in a head-on collision.

The crash occurred about 3 a.m. on Georgia Highway 316 near Winder when authorities said Macias, traveling the wrong way, slammed head on in Buchanan's car, killing her on impact. Buchanan was driving her mother, Julie Olson-Buchanan, to an airport in Atlanta for a flight back home in California. Her mother was critically injured.

In the days after the crash, Macias, who is in his 20s, and his mother disappeared. Barrow County sheriff's investigators charged him with felony vehicular homicide and drunk driving. The sheriff's office turned the manhunt over to the U.S. Marshal's Southeastern Regional Fugitive Task Force.

Buchanan's mother and father, Tim Buchanan, filed a wrongful death lawsuit last year that went before Auslander in a February hearing. The judge heard testimony from the parents and others regarding the value of the young woman's life.

The parents acknowledge after the ruling it is unlikely that Macias will ever make good on the judgment.

See **SUSPECT**, Page 2A

## Athens woman loses \$22K in deputy impersonator scam

**Wayne Ford**  
Athens Banner-Herald  
USA TODAY NETWORK

The fear of being arrested and going to jail has led to yet another person falling for a common scam that has snared many victims in the Athens area.

Last week, Athens-Clarke police officer Bridget Teskey reported she was

traveling on Timothy Road when she was flagged down by a 53-year-old Athens woman in a blue SUV.

The officer noted the woman was on a speaker phone talking to a man who was threatening to have her put in jail unless she paid him more money.

She had already sent him \$22,000. And he wanted more.

The officer told the woman to hang

up. She did, and the woman explained she had been on the phone for about three hours with the man who identified himself as a Clarke County Sheriff's Office deputy, who was telling her "to pay money in order not to be taken to jail," according to the report.

The deputy impersonator directed his victim to her bank, where she withdrew \$7,000 cash, which she deposited

in a bitcoin machine. Then she was directed to another branch of the bank, where she withdrew \$15,000 more cash, the report shows. Again, she deposited this in a bitcoin machine.

The woman said the man coached her on what to tell the bank tellers as to why she was removing the money,

See **SCAM**, Page 2A

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