

TURBULENCE AHEAD: CONSEQUENCES OF DELAYING A LONG-TERM FAA BILL

(118-35)

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
AVIATION
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED EIGHTEENTH CONGRESS

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U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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NOVEMBER 27, 2023

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Aviation
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Aviation
RE: Aviation Subcommittee Hearing on *“Turbulence Ahead: Consequences of Delaying a Long-Term FAA Bill”*

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Aviation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on Thursday, November 30, 2023, at 10:00 a.m. ET in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony at a hearing entitled, *“Turbulence Ahead: Consequences of Delaying a Long-Term FAA Bill.”* The hearing will focus on the need for Congress to pass a comprehensive long-term Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill, the ramifications short-term extensions have on the agency’s operations, and the subsequent effects on the aviation industry and the travelling public. The hearing will also provide an opportunity for Members to discuss key provisions of the House-passed FAA reauthorization bill—H.R. 3935, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation (SGLRAA) Act. The Subcommittee will receive testimony from the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA); the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA); Portland International Jetport on behalf of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE); and the Transport Workers Union (TWU).

II. BACKGROUND

The primary mission of the FAA is ensuring civil aviation safety.¹ The FAA has the responsibility to certify, monitor, and regulate the safety and operations of the civil aviation sector, including airlines, general aviation, unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), airports, commercial space transportation, repair stations, and aircraft manufacturers, as well as establish licensing and training requirements for pilots and other aviation related professionals.² Congress periodically reauthorizes the statutory authorities of the FAA and other Federal civil aviation programs, including the authority to collect aviation taxes which fund the Airport and Airway Trust Fund (AATF), by passing an FAA reauthorization bill. The last long-term FAA reauthorization bill, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (P.L. 115–254) (hereinafter referred to as the “2018 Act”), was passed by Congress and signed by the President on October 5, 2018, authorizing the FAA until October 1, 2023.³

On June 9, 2023, Chairman Sam Graves and Ranking Member Rick Larsen, along with Subcommittee on Aviation Chairman Garret Graves and Ranking Member

¹ *Mission*, FAA, (last updated Nov. 10, 2021), available at <https://www.faa.gov/about/mission>.

² See 49 U.S.C. § 106 (g).

³ FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018, Pub. L. No. 115–254, 132 Stat. 3186.

Steve Cohen, introduced the SGRLAA Act—a bill to reauthorize the FAA through Fiscal Year 2028 with comprehensive policy solutions pertaining to all major sectors of aviation. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I Committee) marked up and approved the SGRLAA Act on June 14, 2023, by a recorded vote of 63–0 and the House passed the bill on July 20, 2023, by a recorded vote of 351–69.⁴

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation (Commerce Committee), which has jurisdiction over the FAA, was scheduled to mark up its FAA reauthorization bill on June 15, 2023; however, the markup was immediately recessed, and the Commerce Committee has not reconvened to consider the bill. In the absence of passing and enacting a long-term FAA reauthorization bill before the 2018 Act expired, Congress enacted a clean three-month extension of the current FAA’s authorities in the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2024 and Other Extensions Act (P.L. 118–15) which was signed into law on September 30, 2023.⁵ Pursuant to the Fiscal Year 2024 Continuing Resolution, the FAA’s statutory authorities are now set to expire on December 31, 2023.

HOUSE PROCESS

In anticipation of needing to reauthorize the FAA by September 30, 2023, T&I Committee leadership, under then Aviation Subcommittee Chair Larsen and Ranking Member Graves, jointly began soliciting priorities from the aviation community in the 117th Congress, so that the Committee could begin drafting an FAA reauthorization bill as soon as the 118th Congress commenced. Chairman Sam Graves renewed that call at the beginning of the 118th Congress.⁶ Chairman Graves publicly stated in January 2023, that the House planned to pass an FAA reauthorization by the beginning of July 2023.⁷

In the Spring of 2023, the Committee also began soliciting input from Members to help inform the development of the bill, which included holding a Member Day in April 2023 where all Members of the House were invited to provide testimony to be considered before the bill’s markup.⁸

The Committee received over 2,000 requests from Members and the aviation community for consideration. These requests formed the foundation of the SGRLAA Act and helped determine the Subcommittee’s hearing agenda ahead of an FAA reauthorization markup. The Subcommittee held five hearings over the first half of 2023, each of which helped to inform specific titles of the SGRLAA Act:

- FAA Reauthorization: Enhancing America’s Gold Standard in Aviation Safety;⁹
- FAA Reauthorization: Securing the Future of General Aviation;¹⁰
- FAA Reauthorization: Navigating the Comprehensive Passenger Experience;¹¹
- FAA Reauthorization: Harnessing the Evolution of Flight to Deliver for the American People;¹² and

⁴H. COMM. ON TRANSP. & INFRASTRUCTURE, SECURING GROWTH AND ROBUST LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN AVIATION ACT, 282, 118th Cong. (2023) (H. Rept. 118–138); CLERK, UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, *Roll Call 364*, 118th Cong., 1st Sess. (July 20, 2023), available at <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2023364>; see also 169 CONG. REC. H3873–H3874 (July 20, 2023) (Roll Call Vote 364) available at <https://www.congress.gov/118/crec/2023/07/20/169/125/CREC-2023-07-20-pt1-PgH3863-4.pdf>.

⁵Div. B, Title II of the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2024 and Other Extensions Act, Pub. L. No. 118–15, 137 Stat. 71.

⁶Email from Staff, Majority Aviation Subcommittee, H. Comm. on Transp. & Infrastructure to Aviation Stakeholders (Jan. 9, 2023, 11:52 a.m. EST) (on file with Comm.).

⁷*Aero Club of Washington: January Luncheon*, (Jan. 26, 2023) (public statement of Sam Graves, Chairman of H. Comm. on Transp. & Infrastructure).

⁸Email from Staff, H. Comm. on Transp. & Infrastructure to Comm. Legislative Assistants (Mar. 3, 2023, 11:06 a.m. EST) (on file with Comm.); *Member Day: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Apr. 18, 2023).

⁹*FAA Reauthorization: Enhancing America’s Gold Standard in Aviation Safety: Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Feb. 7, 2023).

¹⁰*FAA Reauthorization: Securing the Future of General Aviation: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 9, 2023).

¹¹*FAA Reauthorization: Navigating the Comprehensive Passenger Experience: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 23, 2023).

¹²*FAA Reauthorization: Harnessing the Evolution of Flight to Deliver for the American People: Hearing Before Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 30, 2023).

- FAA Reauthorization: Examining the Current and Future Challenges Facing the Aerospace Workforce.¹³

Beginning on June 13, 2023, the Committee held a two-day markup of the SGRLAA Act and considered 137 amendments.¹⁴ The Committee unanimously voted to favorably report the SGRLAA Act out of Committee on June 14, 2023.¹⁵ The SGRLAA Act was then considered by the House beginning on July 19, 2023, and after two days of debate and the adoption of 81 amendments, the House passed the SGRLAA Act by a vote of 351 to 69 on July 20, 2023.¹⁶

SENATE PROCESS

The Senate Commerce Committee also solicited input from Senators and stakeholders throughout the Spring of 2023 and held four hearings in preparation for considering an FAA reauthorization bill:

- Implementation and Oversight of the Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act;¹⁷
- Strengthening the Aviation Workforce;¹⁸
- Enhancing Consumer Protections and Connectivity in Air Transportation;¹⁹ and
- Advancing Next Generation Aviation Technologies.²⁰

The Senate Commerce Committee scheduled a markup of their FAA reauthorization bill, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2023, for June 15, 2023, one day after the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee unanimously passed its own proposal.²¹ However, upon gaveling into the markup, the Committee quickly recessed subject to the call of the Chair. The Senate Commerce Committee's markup remains in recess more than five months later.

While the House dealt with policy disagreements by voting on issues through regular order, the Senate remains at an impasse on resolving a small number of issues, notably including pilot training requirements and the availability of slots at Reagan Washington National Airport, that must be resolved before the Commerce Committee will continue consideration of an FAA reauthorization bill.

III. THE NEGATIVE EFFECT OF EXTENSIONS ON AVIATION

On September 30, 2023, Congress enacted H.R. 5860, a short-term Continuing Resolution that included language to extend FAA's statutory authorities through December 31, 2023, in the absence of Congress enacting a long-term FAA bill before the 2018 Act expired.²² H.R. 5860 allows the FAA to obligate Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grant funding, maintain air traffic controller hiring and training at a time when the FAA continues to face staffing challenges, continue all contracted work, avoid furloughs of non-essential employees working on non-safety-related but still critical projects like rulemaking, and prevents the AATF from losing over \$50 million in aviation excise tax revenues per day.²³

However, continuous extensions only serve to prolong the outdated status quo. Without a new, comprehensive reauthorization, the newly confirmed FAA Administrator, Michael Whitaker, lacks a roadmap of Congressional priorities spanning the length of his five-year appointment. Another extension also does not provide the

¹³ *FAA Reauthorization: Examining the Current and Future Challenges Facing the Aerospace Workforce: Hearing Before Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Apr. 19, 2023).

¹⁴ H. COMM. ON TRANSP. & INFRASTRUCTURE, SECURING GROWTH AND ROBUST LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN AVIATION ACT, 282, 118th Cong. (2023) (H. Rept. 118–138).

¹⁵ *Full Committee Markup: Markup Before the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (June 13–14, 2023).

¹⁶ CLERK, UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, *Roll Call 364*, 118th Cong., 1st Sess. (July 20, 2023), available at <https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2023364>; see also 169 CONG. REC. H3873–H3874 (July 20, 2023) (Roll Call Vote 364) available at <https://www.congress.gov/118/crec/2023/07/20/169/125/CREC-2023-07-20-pt1-PgH3863-4.pdf>.

¹⁷ *Implementation and Oversight of the Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transp.*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 8, 2023).

¹⁸ *Strengthening the Aviation Workforce: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transp.*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 16, 2023).

¹⁹ *Enhancing Consumer Protections and Connectivity in Air Transportation: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transp.*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 23, 2023).

²⁰ *Advancing Next Generation Aviation Technologies: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transportation*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 29, 2023).

²¹ *Executive Session: FAA Reauthorization: Executive Session Before the S. Comm. on Commerce, Science, and Transportation*, 118th Cong. (June 15, 2023).

²² Div. B, Title II of the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2024 and Other Extensions Act, Pub. L. No. 118–15, 137 Stat. 71.

²³ *Id.*

FAA, its workforce, or the private sector with the certainty that each requires and deserves to conduct their business, nor does it provide protections for emerging issues facing the traveling public. Furthermore, another extension does not address systemic problems identified within the FAA over the last few years, including the need to adopt long overdue changes to policy and regulatory requirements to ensure American aviation remains a global leader. Finally, an extension does not provide for any necessary increases in authorization levels for key civil aviation programs, especially those that address crucial workforce, infrastructure and strategic planning needs across the aviation sector.

Unfortunately, Congress has historically resorted to enacting FAA extensions—ranging from a few days to a few years—to maintain the integrity of programs and safety in the National Airspace System (NAS) in the absence of long-term reauthorization bills. From October 2007 through February 2012, Congress passed and enacted 23 FAA authorization extension bills. In 2015, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed the impact of this series of extensions (including a short-term lapse in FAA’s authorization in 2011) and the coinciding budgetary uncertainty. Amongst its findings, the GAO found that “[w]ithout a long-term authorization from 2007 through 2012, FAA delayed new investment decisions for FAA sponsored airport projects” and that “[t]he lapse in FAA’s authorization in 2011 specifically led to the stoppage of work on more than \$10 billion in national airspace and support projects, and \$2.5 billion in grants to new airport projects were withheld, according to FAA documentation [the GAO] reviewed.”²⁴

TIMELY ACTION NEEDED

Fiscal and contractual strain on the FAA are not the only impacts of an extension. While Congressional inaction continues, the United States aviation system continues to evolve. Within the hundreds of provisions in the House-passed reauthorization bill awaiting Senate consideration and action, are important changes that continue to be delayed, and each day, aviation policy falls increasingly out of step with the system it is meant to manage. Congress must act expeditiously to address a growing list of problems, including:

- An increase in high-profile near miss incidents at major United States airports that put the safety of the traveling public at risk.²⁵
- General aviation safety, the need for expanded adoption of safety management systems, and the implementation of technologies that will reduce accident rates like weather cameras.²⁶
- Encouraging the adoption of technologies that will improve safety during all phases of flight including the use of additional runway safety technologies and alternative ADSB solutions.²⁷
- A significantly short-staffed air traffic controller (ATC) workforce, an ATC hiring process hampered by out-of-date workforce projections, and air traffic facilities unable to maintain full operational capabilities and perform on-the-job training due to a lack of personnel.²⁸
- The lack of a regulatory framework for safe, scalable unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) operations beyond visual line-of-sight (BVLOS) and a process to determine airworthiness commensurate with the risk profile of a UAS.²⁹
- The lack of regulations for powered-lift aircraft and regulatory certainty for aerospace innovators at a time of heightened international competition in the advanced air mobility (AAM) sector.³⁰

²⁴ UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, AVIATION FINANCE: OBSERVATIONS ON THE EFFECTS OF BUDGET UNCERTAINTY ON FAA (2015), available at <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-16-198r.pdf>.

²⁵ Press Release, *Readout from the FAA Aviation Safety Summit Breakout Panels*, FAA, (Mar. 15, 2023), available at <https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/readout-faa-aviation-safety-summit-breakout-panels>.

²⁶ Safety Management Systems, 88 Fed. Reg. 1932 (Jan. 11, 2023).

²⁷ *FAA Reauthorization: Securing the Future of General Aviation: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 9, 2023).

²⁸ *NATCA Statement on State of Air Safety and Staffing*, NATCA, (Aug. 21, 2023), available at <https://www.natca.org/2023/08/21/natca-statement-on-state-of-air-safety-and-staffing/>.

²⁹ *FAA Reauthorization: Harnessing the Evolution of Flight to Deliver for the American People: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (March 30, 2023) (statement of Adam Woodworth, Chief Executive Officer, Wing).

³⁰ *FAA Reauthorization: Harnessing the Evolution of Flight to Deliver for the American People: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (March 30, 2023) (statement of JoeBen Bevirt, Chief Executive Officer, Joby Aviation).

- The growing challenges regarding the recruitment, training, and retention of a skilled and robust United States workforce in all segments of the aviation industry.³¹
- Insufficient investment in airports of all sizes, to ensure accessibility for all users and address safety risks.³²
- The long-overdue installation and deployment of NextGen technologies that aim to increase the safety, efficiency, and sustainability of the Nation's air traffic system.³³

IV. WITNESSES

- Pete Bunce, President and Chief Executive Officer, General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA)
- Rich Santa, President, National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA)
- Paul Bradbury, Director, Portland International Jetport, on behalf of American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE)
- Gary Peterson, Executive Director, Transport Workers Union (TWU)

ADDENDUM

An overview of the primary titles of the House-passed FAA Reauthorization bill, the SGRLAA Act.

Title I—Authorizations and FAA Organization Reform

The SGRLAA Act makes targeted changes to the FAA's organizational structure to improve its overall efficiency, better position the agency to innovate and streamline regulatory processes. It clarifies the roles of offices within the agency to streamline approval processes and spur decision making; designates an ombudsman to support pilots, small businesses, and other entities with applications before the agency that aren't progressing; creates an innovation office tasked with tackling cross-office policy issues; and establishes a new Assistant Administrator to improve the FAA's rulemaking processes. The SGRLAA Act also closes several rulemaking projects that are no longer relevant and relieves the agency from burdensome activities that are underutilized to allow the FAA to prioritize its resources elsewhere.

The SGRLAA Act reauthorizes funding levels for the FAA that better represent the agency's current work and makes historic investments in the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) by increasing this funding from \$3.35 billion to \$4 billion annually.

Title II—General Aviation

America's aviation system would not be where it is today without a healthy general aviation sector, and in fact, most of all aviation professionals these days, including pilots and mechanics, get their start in general aviation. The SGRLAA Act recognizes that the success of the United States aviation system is built upon a strong general aviation foundation. The SGRLAA Act includes the first-ever general aviation title to secure our aviation industry's long-term success by addressing safety gaps and process inefficiencies in the general aviation sector. These include provisions to expand BasicMed, ensure transparency, and improve incentivize increased use of on-board safety technology in the general aviation fleet.

Title III—Aerospace Workforce

The SGRLAA Act addresses workforce challenges by removing barriers to pursuing aviation careers, increasing investment in workforce development programs and creating a National Center for the Advancement of Aerospace to ensure a robust talent pipeline, directing FAA to reform its air traffic controller hiring and

³¹FAA Reauthorization: Examining the Current and Future Challenges Facing the Aerospace Workforce: Hearing Before Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure, 118th Cong. (Apr. 19, 2023).

³²FAA Reauthorization: Navigating the Comprehensive Passenger Experience: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure, 118th Cong. (Mar. 23, 2023) (statement of Kevin Dolliole, Director of Aviation, Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport).

³³FED. AVIATION ADMIN., NATIONAL AIRSPACE SYSTEM SAFETY REVIEW TEAM, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS RISK IN THE NATIONAL AIRSPACE SYSTEM (2023), available at https://www.faa.gov/NAS_safety_review_team_report.pdf.

staffing models, improving pilot training standards, and supporting the career transition between the military and civilian workforces.

Title IV—Airport Infrastructure

The SGRLAA Act authorizes a historic increase in funding to \$4 billion annually for the AIP, which has been stagnant since 2012. This funding increase includes provisions prioritizing investments for small and GA airports and acts to streamline grant requirements to expedite project deliveries. Furthermore, the SGRLAA Act allows airports to use AIP funding for airport resiliency projects and creates a minimum level of annual AIP discretionary funding for certain airport programs. The bill also adds a dollar-based categorical exclusion for airport projects with limited Federal assistance, allowing airports to finish projects more quickly.

Title V—Aviation Safety

The SGRLAA Act addresses several safety issues to ensure the United States remains the world's gold standard in aviation safety. The SGRLAA Act addresses the recent uptick in runway incursions by expanding the use of new ground detection and surveillance technologies and addressing underlying surface safety risks. The SGRLAA Act addresses operational and certification risks while ensuring the FAA appropriately regulates industry stakeholders and encourages the agency to improve its international engagement. It also requires the FAA to better leverage safety data to predict and mitigate risks, and addresses cybersecurity risks within both the FAA and aviation industry. Additionally, the bill ensures that foreign aircraft repair stations are subject to the same standards as American repair stations. Furthermore, the bill helps to ensure the safety of flight crews and passengers by requiring the FAA to propose requirements for retrofitting secondary barriers on airplanes, and to develop recommendations to prevent assaults against airline personnel.

Title VI—Aerospace Innovation

The SGRLAA Act encourages safer and more efficient testing and integration of new technologies, such as drones and AAM, into the airspace to preserve our competitive edge in these emerging sectors. The bill achieves this by creating a regulatory framework that allows the FAA to pursue avenues for the safe expansion of drone operations and applying realistic deadlines for the agency to meet, requiring rules for BVLOS UAS operations and risk-based operational approvals, ensuring there are appropriate requirements for powered-lift aircraft entry-into-service, and supporting the continued operation of commercial space transportation.

Furthermore, the SGRLAA Act supports local communities' efforts to leverage the benefits of new aviation technologies by providing funding for state, local and Tribal governments to use drones to visually inspect, repair and maintain critical infrastructure, and funds grants for state and local governments to plan for future AAM operations. It also ensures the important voices of local communities and current airspace users are heard as new entrants emerge in U.S. skies.

Title VII—Passenger Experience Improvements

The SGRLAA Act will preserve air travel as a reliable mode of transportation by including reforms to holistically enhance the passenger experience for all members of the travelling public. It directs airlines to improve personnel training and address damage to wheelchairs and mobility aids to improve accessibility for passengers with disabilities, directs the FAA to make improvements to the air traffic control system and infrastructure, addresses the increased cost of Essential Air Service while ensuring the program continues, makes targeted reforms to small community air service programs.

Furthermore, the SGRLAA Act ensures the Department of Transportation (DOT) recognizes that they too play a pivotal role in on-time passenger travel. For instance, it directs DOT to require airlines to develop policies addressing reimbursement for passengers for hotel and meal costs when a flight is cancelled or significantly delayed. The bill also requires airlines to develop airline operation resiliency plans to help prevent and limit the impact of mass flight disruptions and requires airlines to establish policies on allowing passengers to sit next to their young child if adjacent seats are available.

Title VIII—Miscellaneous

The aviation system in the United States is complex and diverse and requires Congressional attention in many areas. The SGRLAA Act addresses several unique

needs and challenges to ensure our system remains the gold standard. It requires the FAA to establish an updated internal telework policy, addresses issues related to aircraft certification and manufacturing standards, strengthens certain protections for crewmembers and gate agents, and includes several studies and reports on issues such as the FAA's aging information technology infrastructure, congested airspace, the aviation workforce, aircraft noise, airline mergers and air cargo operations to inform Congress's and the FAA's work going forward.

Title IX—National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Amendments Act of 2023

As the independent Federal agency responsible for investigating all civil aviation accidents, as well as accidents in other modes of transportation, the NTSB plays an important role in transportation safety. The NTSB was last authorized for four years in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act.³⁴ The SGRLAA Act rectifies the lapse in NTSB authorization and provides necessary updates such as requiring the NTSB to address gaps in its workforce and technical capabilities, establishing necessary oversight of the NTSB, and improving delivery of family assistance.

³⁴ Pub. L. No. 115–254, 132 Stat. 3186.

TURBULENCE AHEAD: CONSEQUENCES OF DELAYING A LONG-TERM FAA BILL

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2023

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
Washington, DC.

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:06 a.m. in room 2167 Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Garret Graves (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Good morning. The Subcommittee on Aviation will come to order.

I ask unanimous consent the chairman be authorized to declare a recess at any time during today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that Members not on the subcommittee be permitted to sit on the subcommittee at today's hearing and ask questions.

Without objection, so ordered.

As a reminder, if Members wish to insert a document into the record for the hearing, please also email it to DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

I now recognize myself for the purposes of making an opening statement.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. GARRET GRAVES OF LOUISIANA, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today. As you all know, we do an aviation bill every 5 years, and the last bill we did was in 2018. I am not a math wizard, but we need to do a bill this year. We are currently operating under a temporary extension.

More importantly, we are doing an aviation bill not just because there is an expiration, but because there's an extraordinary amount of work to be done. Much of that work is a result of the fact that we had challenges within the FAA with the MAX incident, the fact that we have gone without a full Administrator, have had an Acting Administrator for way too long of a period of time. And I want to take a minute and say that I am very excited about the Administrator that is there, I appreciate the strong support that was demonstrated in his confirmation in the United States Senate, and I look forward to working closely with him.

But more importantly, we have seen innovators, as we are going to hear more about today, develop technologies that go well beyond

the regulatory framework or the organizational structure contemplated by the FAA. We have seen where air traffic control capacity has limited or restricted flights into areas like Florida, like in the Northeast Corridor, therefore limiting options for consumers. We have seen where runway incursions have threatened the safety and the lives of passengers, and this is during a period where we have seen extraordinary progress in safety in the last decade compared to the previous decade. I think we had something like 140 deaths two decades ago, whereas over the last decade, I think we had 3: an extraordinary difference and huge progress in safety.

We passed our bill in July, and here we have a House of Representatives that is as polarized as I have ever seen it. We can't even agree if gravity is real, yet we had a vote with 351 folks in support, and only 69 folks that were confused on that legislation. And I want to thank Ranking Member Cohen and Ranking Member Larsen, and, obviously, our chairman, Sam Graves, for the hard work, and the entire aviation team and Members. I reminded some of our Members yesterday we had 2,000 unique submissions from Members of Congress, stakeholders, and others on this legislation. We put a bill together that got a unanimous vote in the committee and an incredibly strong vote in the House of Representatives.

This isn't about just passing legislation for the purposes of being able to hang a memorial on the wall. This is about innovation. It's about safety. It's about ensuring that the United States maintains its leadership in aviation technology and in aviation safety. And it is absolutely critical that the United States Senate move this bill.

I am going to say it again. I think that safety is at risk, I think that American leadership and aviation is at risk. And I'm looking forward to hearing from our witnesses today to learn more about their perspective, but we cannot continue to remain stuck or remain sort of centered on a number of these key issues that require decisions, that require law changes, that require organizational changes. I can't emphasize enough about the importance of moving this bill forward.

And clearly, when you look at issues that have been raised including just recently, when new safety standards came out by the National Airspace System Safety Review Team that issued a scathing report looking at issues that needed to be fixed in the aviation industry, when I look at our bill, I say, gosh, actually, I think we got it right. We addressed a number of the issues preemptively, or before the report was even issued. And I think that we really have struck that right balance. I am not going to tell you that the bill is perfect, but I will tell you it is pretty damn close, and I am very excited about the progress that we have made.

So, with that, I want to again thank the witnesses for being here. I once again want to urge the United States Senate to move forward as quickly as possible.

[Mr. Graves of Louisiana's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Garret Graves of Louisiana, Chairman,
Subcommittee on Aviation**

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today. As you all know, we reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) every five years, but we've operated under a temporary extension of the 2018 authorization since September.

We passed the U.S. House of Representatives FAA reauthorization bill in July despite the chamber being the most polarized I've ever seen it. Yet, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act passed the chamber with an overwhelming vote of 351-69 after unanimous support in this committee.

That vote was the result of 2,000 unique requests from Members of Congress and stakeholders. I want to thank Subcommittee Ranking Member Steve Cohen, Full Committee Ranking Member Rick Larsen, and our Chairman Sam Graves, as well as the entire Aviation Subcommittee team and our colleagues within the full committee for their work to support such a comprehensive piece of reform.

Congress doesn't do an FAA bill just because the agency's authorization lapses, but because there's an extraordinary amount of work to be done. Over the past few years, the FAA has experienced an immense set of challenges: the 737 MAX incidents, the bust-and-boom nature of the pandemic, and restrictions on flight capacity—particularly in Florida and in the Northeast—which have limited options for consumers. Additionally, we have seen aviation innovators develop technologies that go well beyond the regulatory framework or the organizational structure of the FAA. Meanwhile, we were without a U.S. Senate-confirmed FAA administrator for over a year and a half.

I look forward to working with the new administrator and am pleased that he has focused first and foremost on safety. Two decades ago, commercial aviation saw 140 deaths in a 10-year period; however, in the past decade there were only three. This shows immense progress in safety, and that needs to be maintained and strengthened. However, recently there has been an alarming instance of runway incursions.

It is absolutely critical that the United States Senate move forward to pass this reauthorization. Without a full reauthorization of the FAA, safety is at risk and American leadership in aviation technology and innovation is at risk. This agency cannot continue to remain in limbo on a number of key issues that require decisions, law changes, and organizational reforms. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of moving this bill forward, especially where safety is concerned.

Recently, the FAA's independent National Airspace System Safety Review Team (SRT) issued a scathing report detailing a number of aviation industry issues that need to be fixed.

When I look at the U.S. House's FAA reauthorization bill, I say, 'Gosh, actually, I think we got it right.' We addressed a number of those issues in our bill before the report was even issued, and I think we really have struck that right balance. I won't tell you that the bill is perfect—but I will tell you that it is pretty close.

With that, I want to again thank the witnesses for being here. I again want to urge the United States Senate to move forward on the FAA bill as quickly as possible and look forward to hearing from our witnesses on why this is such a critical issue.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. I look forward to hearing from our ranking member, Mr. Cohen, and recognize him for 5 minutes.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. STEVE COHEN OF TENNESSEE,
RANKING MEMBER, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION**

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Chairman Graves. It is good to be here with the Aviation Subcommittee.

We had four subcommittee hearings on this bill and one full committee hearing on FAA reauthorization and had the opportunity to examine and discuss various aviation priorities, from ensuring safety, which is, of course, number 1, to improving the passenger experience, which is 1(a), to general aviation and the safe integration of emerging technologies and more.

We worked in a bipartisan manner to pass our FAA reauthorization out of the full committee and to the House, where it had overwhelming support with 69 wayward people who did not understand the issues, as Mr. Graves has clearly pointed out. And we are here

today because our colleagues in the other Chamber have not made the same progress.

I have heard for years variations on a theme that the enemy is not the other party, the enemy is the Senate. And in this committee, it really is. When I come in here, I don't really look at the division here between this side of the aisle and that side of the aisle as a division. We are the Aviation Subcommittee, and we are the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. But the Senate, it's the Senate. So, we have to hope that the Senate Commerce Committee will get its act together and mark up this bill. They have had 5 months when they have been in recess for those 5 months, and the House has dealt with policy disagreements by voting on issues through regular order.

Reauthorizing the FAA in a timely manner is vital to the continuity of the U.S. aviation industry and helps ensure aviation safety, infrastructure, and workforce development programs remain top priorities. Workforce development is so important because we need more and more people as FAA employees, working on flight safety—there are not enough employees there right now. So, we need more, and we need to bring them through the process, get them into the process, and open it up to more and more people.

By passing short-term extensions, which we have already done once to extend the FAA's authorities through December and will likely have to do it again before the end of the year, we continue to perpetuate the outdated status quo that jeopardizes our global leadership in aviation. The absence of a long-term FAA reauthorization is a disservice to the agency's hard-working employees, the industry, and the traveling public.

So, we have got a new Administrator, Mr. Whitaker. He is at a disadvantage, but he is going to be a good one. And we needed a new Administrator, and we got a good one.

The extensions have temporarily worked in the past, but the National Airspace System has advanced to a point where such extensions fail to address systemic problems and new challenges, especially those that require significant regulatory and policy improvements to keep the U.S. on the cutting edge of aerospace.

Furthermore, the use of continued extensions not only creates uncertainty within the aviation industry, but often results in the delay of FAA-sponsored airport projects that are critical to proving airport infrastructure. If not evident already, the overreliance on extensions has proven detrimental and will result in the failure to address a litany of critical issues, including:

- Safety concerns at airports such as runway near-misses, and I guess that's the biggest thing we've got, and that's the thing Mr. Whitaker spoke to me about as his first priority was the runway near-misses, and that's serious business. There are not enough folks there overseeing traffic.
- Safety management systems expansion,
- Fostering technological advancements in the NAS, and
- Insufficient investment in airports and NextGen technologies.

For these reasons and more, there is the need to pass our comprehensive bill, which is vital to the continuity and safety of U.S. aviation.

Our House-passed bill makes historic airport infrastructure investments; enhances safety; and protects consumers, including those with disabilities, which is very important—and we just saw some issue with a wheelchair being cavalierly tossed down a ramp, and people need to be more concerned about that—addresses environmental resiliency; ensures the safe operation and integration of unmanned aircraft systems and advanced air mobility aircraft; and improves the development of the U.S. aviation workforce, especially in minority communities.

Just last week, the independent Safety Review Team, assembled by the FAA in response to multiple close calls at airports, issued a 52-page report calling on the FAA and Congress to address safety risks in our Nation’s aviation system. In the report, the safety group highlighted a multitude of issues such as staffing shortages among air traffic controllers and outdated technology. As the Safety Review Team stated, “There are no easy short-term fixes to address many of these challenges. Addressing risk in the [NAS] requires the FAA, the administration, Congress, and others to work together collaboratively.”

There is no better place to start than in Congress by sending our House-passed, long-term reauthorization bill to the President’s desk. Our bill preserves and enhances America’s aviation system, which was the world’s gold standard, probably still is, but needs to have improvements. It contains hundreds of provisions that will benefit our system and remains delayed in the Senate.

So, this committee, I think, if it was a microcosm of Congress, George Santos wouldn’t have anything to talk about. Instead, he lies and tells terrible things about the Congress. If he was talking about the Senate, so be it, but not the House of Representatives.

I yield back the balance of my time.

[Mr. Cohen’s prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Steve Cohen of Tennessee, Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Aviation**

Thank you. It’s great to be here with Chairman Graves for another Aviation Subcommittee hearing.

Earlier this year, we held four Subcommittee hearings and one full Committee hearing on FAA reauthorization, where we had the opportunity to examine and discuss various aviation priorities—from ensuring safety to improving the passenger experience, to general aviation and the safe integration of emerging technologies and more.

While we worked in a bipartisan way to pass our FAA reauthorization bill out of our full Committee and in the House—with overwhelming votes of support—we are here today because our colleagues in the other chamber have not made the same progress.

The Senate Commerce Committee’s markup on their FAA reauthorization bill has been in recess for more than five months, and while the House dealt with policy disagreements by voting on issues through regular order, the Senate remains at an impasse.

Reauthorizing the FAA in a timely matter is vital to the continuity of the U.S. aviation industry and helps to ensure aviation safety, infrastructure, and workforce development programs remain top priorities at such a critical juncture.

By continuing to pass short term extensions, which we have already done once to extend the FAA’s authorities through December, and will likely have to do once more before the end of the year, we continue to perpetuate the outdated status quo that jeopardizes our global leadership in aviation.

The absence of a long-term FAA reauthorization is a disservice to the agency and its hardworking employees, the aviation industry, and the traveling public. Furthermore, it places the newly appointed FAA Administrator, Mr. Mike Whitaker, at a disadvantage as he aims to maintain aviation safety and ensure the efficiency of U.S. airspace.

Although extensions have temporarily worked in the past, the National Airspace System (NAS) has advanced to a point where such extensions fail to address systemic problems and new challenges, especially those that require significant regulatory and policy improvements to keep the U.S. on the cutting-edge of aerospace technology.

Further, the use of continual extensions not only creates uncertainty within the aviation industry, but often results in the delay of FAA-sponsored airport projects that are critical to improving airport infrastructure.

If not evident already, the overreliance on extensions for the FAA has proven detrimental and will result in the failure to address a litany of critical issues, including:

- Safety concerns at airports, such as runway near-misses;
- Safety management systems expansion;
- Fostering technological advancements in the NAS; and
- Insufficient investment in airports and NexGen technologies.

For these reasons and many more, the need to pass a long-term comprehensive FAA reauthorization bill is vital to the safety and continuity of U.S. aviation.

Our House-passed bill makes historic airport infrastructure investments, enhances aviation safety, protects consumers including those with disabilities, addresses environmental resiliency, ensures the safe operation and integration of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) aircraft, and improves the development of the U.S. aviation workforce, especially in minority communities.

Just last week, the independent Safety Review Team assembled by the FAA in response to multiple close calls at airports across the country issued a 52-page report calling on the FAA and Congress to address safety risks in our nation's aviation system.

In the report, the safety group highlighted a multitude of issues such as staffing shortages among air traffic controllers and outdated technology.

As the Safety Review Team stated, "There are no easy short-term fixes to address many of these challenges. Addressing risk in the [NAS] requires the FAA, the administration, Congress and others across industry to work together collaboratively."

I can think of no better place to start than by Congress sending our House-passed long-term reauthorization bill to the President's desk.

Our bill preserves and enhances America's aviation system, which is the world's gold standard, and ensures a robust and vibrant future for U.S. aviation.

It contains hundreds of provisions that will benefit and improve our aviation system now, but the bill remains delayed while we wait on Senate action.

It is my hope that FAA extensions will be a thing of the past after this year. I encourage our Senate colleagues to work swiftly to pass their bill so that we can negotiate our differences in conference and move forward with a robust five-year reauthorization.

I thank all the witnesses for being here today and look forward to today's discussion.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Cohen, and I want to thank you for raising the passenger experience issue that I omitted. I am not going to comment on the rest of your speech, particularly the closing, but I do want to thank you for raising that, because that needs to remain our primary focus here.

With that, I yield 5 minutes to the ranking member of the full committee, the gentleman from Washington, Mr. Larsen.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. RICK LARSEN OF WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Chair Graves, for calling today's hearing to reinforce the need for a long-term, comprehensive FAA reauthorization.

The last few years have exacerbated ongoing challenges facing our aviation system, and Congress has a responsibility to address these challenges to ensure the U.S. remains the gold standard in aviation. This committee engaged in a thoughtful and holistic process to draft the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act earlier this year. While there are certainly times when we disagreed, we put those issues to a vote. We accepted the outcome of those votes, and moved the final product in a bipartisan way to the floor of the House, and passed it on the floor 351 to 69.

There is a need to act. Last February, a Boeing 767 cargo plane almost landed on a Boeing 737 passenger plane at Austin International Airport. Without the quick action by the cargo plane pilots, 131 lives could have been lost. Similar near-miss accidents have occurred at Philadelphia, Memphis, Miami, Chicago, New York, and Las Vegas.

As a result of the spike in these incidents, the FAA commissioned an independent Safety Review Team, or SRT, this past April to recommend ways to enhance safety and reliability of the Nation's air traffic system. Those recommendations, delivered earlier this month, validate much of what this committee found as it engaged with stakeholders during the FAA reauthorization process.

One of those conclusions bears highlighting today: "... the current erosion in the margin of safety in the [National Airspace System] caused by the confluence of these challenges is rendering the current level of safety unsustainable." So, I commend newly appointed FAA Administrator Whitaker as the FAA announced six steps it will take to start addressing the report's findings, especially regarding air traffic controller hiring and training.

One of the critical findings in the SRT report is that "the combined effect of irregular operations [caused] by [controller] staff shortages erodes the margin of safety in the NAS." It then calls on stakeholders in the aviation ecosystem to take immediate action to ensure the U.S. remains the gold standard in aviation safety.

The House-passed FAA reauthorization is precisely what the report calls for, taking significant steps towards keeping the U.S. aviation system the safest in the world.

Section 314 specifically addresses the staffing challenges that the SRT found, requiring the FAA to hire the maximum number of air traffic controllers and to adopt the most appropriate controller staffing model, as determined by an independent third party, to ensure our controller workforce accurately reflects the system's growing needs.

Section 501 addresses another finding in the report by requiring the installation of surface surveillance technology at all medium- and large-hub airports to help prevent future runway incursions.

Section 221 addresses the report's equipage findings by renewing the ADS-B rebate program to incentivize broader equipage of on-board safety technologies for all aircraft.

These are crucial reforms, and this committee did its work.

Now, safety goes hand in hand with other critical needs in the air transportation system also addressed in the House bill. Last December, Courtney Edwards, a 34-year-old airport ramp worker and mother of three, was pulled into an Embraer E175 jet engine and killed while working at the ramp at Montgomery Regional Air-

port. This tragic incident highlights the dangers that our aviation workforce braves every day to ensure the safety of the traveling public. The House-passed bill includes a ramp safety call to action. It makes robust investments in preparing and protecting the next generation of pilots, maintenance technicians, manufacturing workers, and other critical professions to support the rapidly evolving global aviation sector.

Just this week, a passenger in Miami allegedly assaulted and knocked a gate agent unconscious, causing “a significant amount of blood” and delaying the flight by several hours. As unruly passengers continue to pose a threat to flightcrews and other frontline workers, our bill protects workers by creating a task force to prevent assaults and mandating that airlines establish employee assault and response plans.

And in recent years, flight cancellations and delays have shaken the flying public’s confidence in our system. I recall last December’s meltdown that left thousands of passengers stranded and ruined many Americans’ holiday travel plans. To get us back on the right course, our House bill requires airlines to create resiliency plans to help prevent mass flight disruptions and have policies to reimburse passengers for expenses incurred from these disruptions.

While preventing mass flight disruptions is one way to protect consumers, we must do more to ensure all passengers can travel safely and with dignity. Last week’s video appearing to show a wheelchair being intentionally mishandled in Miami made clear that more work is needed to ensure dignified travel for all Americans. The House bill improves training for airline personnel and contractors on assisting travelers with disabilities and mobility devices, and directs the DOT to create a roadmap for airlines to reduce damage to wheelchairs and mobility aids.

And as the impacts of climate change are felt in communities nationwide, this bill makes groundbreaking investments in sustainability, including allowing Federal funding for hydrogen and unleaded fuel infrastructure.

The bill also increases funding for the Airport Improvement Program from \$3.35 billion to \$4 billion annually, of which at least \$150 million in discretionary funds, the largest portion ever required before, is to be used to support airport environmental and noise programs.

In conclusion, the current and future challenges facing the U.S. aviation system are significant. I believe we can meet them. It requires urgent and decisive action by all of Congress. The House did its job. This committee did its job. Congratulations on that. I look forward to hearing from today’s witnesses on the consequences of further delaying FAA reauthorization, and I look forward to someday soon conferencing with the Senate to get a long-term bill to the President’s desk.

With that, I yield back.

[Mr. Larsen of Washington’s prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Hon. Rick Larsen of Washington, Ranking Member,
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure**

Thank you, Chairman Graves, for calling today's hearing to reinforce the need for a long-term, comprehensive FAA reauthorization.

The last few years have exacerbated ongoing challenges facing our aviation system. Congress has a responsibility to address these challenges to ensure the United States remains the gold standard in aviation safety and air transportation.

This Committee engaged in a thoughtful and holistic process to draft the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act earlier this year.

While there were certainly times when we disagreed, we put those issues to a vote, and we accepted the outcome of those votes.

And the final product has overwhelming bipartisan support, passing unanimously out of this Committee in June and passing the House floor in July by a vote of 351 to 69.

There is a need to act. Last February, a Boeing 767 cargo plane almost landed on a Boeing 737 passenger plane at Austin International Airport. Without the quick action by the cargo plane pilots, 131 lives could have been lost that day.

Similar near miss incidents have occurred at Philadelphia, Memphis, Miami, Chicago, New York, and Las Vegas.

As a result of the spike in these incidents, the FAA commissioned an independent Safety Review Team (or SRT) this past April to recommend ways to enhance the safety and reliability of the nation's air traffic system.

Those recommendations, delivered earlier this month, validate much of what this Committee found as it engaged with stakeholders during its FAA Reauthorization process.

One of those conclusions bears highlighting today—"... the current erosion in the margin of safety in the [national airspace system] caused by the confluence of these challenges is rendering the current level of safety unsustainable."

I commend newly appointed FAA Administrator Whitaker, as the FAA announced six steps it will take to start addressing the report's findings, especially regarding air traffic controller hiring and training.

One of the most critical findings in the SRT report is that "the combined effect of irregular operations [caused] by [controller] staff shortages erodes the margin of safety in the NAS." It then calls on all stakeholders in the aviation ecosystem to take immediate action to ensure the United States remains the gold standard in aviation safety.

The House-passed FAA Reauthorization is precisely what the report calls for, taking significant steps towards keeping the U.S. aviation system the safest in the world.

Section 314 specifically addresses the staffing challenges the SRT found, requiring the FAA to hire the maximum number of air traffic controllers and to adopt the most appropriate controller staffing model, as determined by an independent third party, to ensure our controller workforce accurately reflects the system's growing needs.

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Section 221 addresses the report's equipage findings by renewing the ADS-B rebate program to incentivize broader equipage of onboard safety technologies for all aircraft.

These are crucial reforms and this Committee did its work.

Safety goes hand-in-hand with other critical needs in air transportation also addressed in the House's bill.

Last December, Courtney Edwards—a 34-year-old airport ramp worker and mother of three—was pulled into an Embraer E175 jet engine and killed while working the ramp at Montgomery Regional Airport. This tragic incident highlights the dangers our aviation workforce braves every day to ensure the safety of the traveling public.

The House-passed bill includes a ramp safety call to action and makes robust investments in preparing and protecting the next generation of pilots, maintenance technicians, manufacturing workers and other critical professions to support the rapidly evolving global aviation sector.

Just this week, a passenger in Miami allegedly assaulted and knocked a gate agent unconscious—causing a "significant amount of blood" and delaying the flight by several hours.

As unruly passengers continue to pose a threat to flight crews and other frontline workers, our bill protects workers by creating a task force to prevent assaults and mandating that airlines establish employee assault and response plans.

In recent years, flight cancellations and delays have shaken the flying public's confidence in our aviation system. Recall last December's meltdown that left thousands of passengers stranded and ruined many Americans' holiday travel plans.

To get us back on the right course, the House bill requires airlines to create resiliency plans to help prevent mass flight disruptions, and to have policies to reimburse passengers for expenses incurred from these disruptions.

While preventing mass flight disruptions is one way to protect consumers, we must also do more to ensure *all* passengers can travel safely and with dignity.

Last week's video appearing to show a wheelchair being intentionally mishandled in Miami made clear that more work is needed to ensure dignified travel for all Americans.

The House bill improves training for airline personnel and contractors on assisting travelers with disabilities and mobility devices and directs the DOT to create a roadmap for airlines to reduce damage to wheelchairs and mobility aids.

As the impacts of climate change are felt in communities nationwide, this bill makes groundbreaking investments in sustainability, including allowing federal funding for hydrogen and unleaded fuel infrastructure.

The bill also increases funding for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) from \$3.35 billion to \$4 billion annually, of which at least \$150 million in discretionary funds—the largest portion that's ever been required before—are to be used to support airport environmental and noise programs.

In conclusion, the current and future challenges facing the U.S. aviation system are significant. I believe we can meet them, but it requires urgent and decisive action by this Congress. The House did its job, the Committee did its job—congratulations on that.

I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses on the consequences of further delaying FAA Reauthorization.

And I look forward to conferencing soon with my Senate colleagues to get a long-term bill to the President's desk.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Larsen.

Briefly, I want to take a minute to explain our lighting system to our witnesses. There are three lights in front of you: green means go, yellow means you are running out of time, and red means conclude your remarks.

I ask unanimous consent that the witnesses' full statements be included in the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

I ask unanimous consent that the record of today's hearing remain open until such time as our witnesses have provided answers to any questions that may be submitted to them in writing.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also ask unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by Members or witnesses to be included in the record of today's hearing.

Without objection, so ordered.

Mr. COHEN. As your written testimony has been made part of the record, the subcommittee asks you to limit your remarks to 5 minutes.

With that, Mr. Bunce, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF PETER J. BUNCE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GENERAL AVIATION MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION; RICH SANTA, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS ASSOCIATION, AFL-CIO; PAUL BRADBURY, P.E., AIRPORT DIRECTOR, PORTLAND INTERNATIONAL JETPORT, ON BEHALF OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF AIRPORT EXECUTIVES; AND GARY PETERSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA

TESTIMONY OF PETER J. BUNCE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GENERAL AVIATION MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

Mr. BUNCE. Chairman Garret Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, Chairman Sam Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen, thank you for calling this hearing to address this critical need for us to get finished with the FAA reauthorization bill.

I have been doing this job at GAMA for now 19 years, and I have never seen a time that is more important for us to get the FAA reauthorized and address some of the critical issues that both of you addressed in your opening remarks, along with Ranking Member Larsen, but also many of the other things that facilitate safety that aren't talked about in the press these days.

To watch what this committee did earlier this year, as a taxpayer, I was very proud to know the members of this committee. To be able to go ahead and mark out a committee in a unanimous form a very important piece of legislation is a model of legislative governance. And then how you handled the amendment process, in addition, really serves as testament not only to this committee's members, but also this incredible staff that you have that really worked together to produce a great bill.

And the time could not be more critical to be able to finish the job. When we look at the challenges that Administrator Whitaker has in front of him, they are daunting. And it was really important for all of us also to note that over on the Senate side, his nomination was handled in a very thoughtful process. It shouldn't be lost on anybody that Chairman Sam Graves went over to introduce Mr. Whitaker to the Senate, and the proof is in the pudding. They confirmed him in a unanimous vote and gave him a mandate that he needs to be able to fix a lot of the critical issues that are facing not only the FAA, but also in its relationship with DOT and the rest of the administration.

Earlier this week, the Management Advisory Council to the FAA, of which both myself and Mr. Santa are privileged to be members, sent a letter to the leadership of both the House and Senate talking about the critical importance and what we need Mr. Whitaker to focus on and not be distracted from.

If we don't get an FAA reauthorization bill done, the Administrator has to handle all of the disruptions that are handled with continuing resolutions, extensions. But also, when you couple that with a potential for shutdowns, which—people don't realize what kind of perturbations that forces upon industry when something like that happens, but also to be able to get stability through getting the fiscal year 2024 appropriations bill passed. They need the

stability and the resources to be able to complete the tasks of being able to address the issues.

We have been for far too long without an FAA leader, but also there was a domino effect. So, we had many of the positions within the FAA and acting positions. That has now sorted itself out with Mr. Whitaker being in place, and the result is we can now move forward on fixing a lot of the issues. This committee really addressed a lot of those issues through previous hearings.

Of course, we all know that Mr. Santa's organization, NATCA, and the controllers out there are understaffed and overworked. And this bill, as Ranking Member Larsen talked about, really starts to address that.

But also, the slow pace of employees getting back to work in the office, especially in the certification directorate, is critical—it is really hampering industry right now because the workforce is so green, they have lost so much expertise right now. We have got to be able to train them, which this bill addresses.

And also, it addresses the regulatory process, which, right now, we all know is so long and laborious that other leading authorities in other nations are now starting to exert their leadership in the global environment to be able to have their regulations be pre-eminent.

The need to keep pace with technology is so important. Technology can solve a lot of the issues, especially that Ranking Member Larsen just talked about. We can provide technology not only to Mr. Santa's controllers, but also to the pilots to enhance their situational awareness. But we have got to be able to get through the certification process to get that done.

And the need for investments in the workforce to not only focus on pilots and maintenance professionals, but also the folks that work in our factories for manufacturing to be able to get that complete.

So, in sum, getting this bill done is so critical to the safety of this Nation, but also for our global leadership. The United States has always been a leader in aerospace, and to continue to do so, we have got to get this bill done.

Thank you.

[Mr. Bunce's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Peter J. Bunce, President and Chief Executive Officer, General Aviation Manufacturers Association

Subcommittee Chairman Garret Graves, Ranking Member Steve Cohen, Chairman Sam Graves, and Ranking Member Rick Larsen, on behalf of the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA) and its member companies, thank you for convening today's hearing which focuses on the importance of Congress moving at maximum velocity operating speed to enact a long-term Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization bill. As I testified at the Committee's kickoff FAA Reauthorization hearing on aviation safety in February, this legislation is critically needed to support FAA leadership, direction, and stability and facilitate the aviation sector's future path towards increasing levels of safety and innovation.

By way of background, GAMA represents more than 140 of the world's leading manufacturers of general aviation airplanes and rotorcraft, engines, avionics, advanced air mobility aircraft (AAM), components, and related services and technologies. GAMA members are also providers of maintenance and repair services, fixed-based operations, pilot and maintenance training, and aircraft management companies. GAMA companies have facilities in 48 states and 27 countries. A recent

economic impact study determined that the general aviation industry supports \$247 billion in economic output and 1.2 million jobs in the U.S.¹

We thank the leadership and members of this committee for their bipartisan collaboration and efforts in facilitating passage of the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in Aviation Act (H.R. 3935)². Your timely work earlier this year reauthorizing the FAA is a tremendous accomplishment and is deeply appreciated and strongly praised by our membership. We support the strong general aviation focus in the bill as general aviation is a critical point of entry for pilots and mechanics interested in careers in the aviation industry as well as a critical technology incubator with benefits not only to general aviation but eventually the entire civil aviation industry.

GAMA also applauds the U.S. Senate confirmation of Mike Whitaker to be FAA Administrator. We commend the Senate for their quick action on his nomination, and want to recognize members of this Committee, particularly Chairman Sam Graves, for their strong advocacy of this nomination.

Administrator Whitaker and the agency face a critical inflection point in furthering our collective efforts to advance aviation safety, sustainability, technology, and innovation. Congress must give the Administrator the tools and support he and the agency need to be successful. Enacting a long-term reauthorization by the end of the year will provide a strong foundation for the agency and set a positive trajectory at an important juncture in time. The significance of enacting a timely passage of a multi-year FAA Reauthorization bill and confirming an FAA Administrator was recently emphasized in a letter from 28 aviation associations.³ Additionally, this week, the non-governmental members of the FAA Management Advisory Council, of which I am a member, sent a letter⁴ to House and Senate leadership emphasizing the importance of action on FAA Reauthorization and a full year appropriations bill for the agency.

For GAMA and its members, the stakes are clear: do we want Administrator Whitaker to spend his time managing lapses in authority and appropriations or focus his time on addressing the agency's significant challenges and taking advantage of opportunities? As we have seen in the past, if action is not taken now, it will have both near-term and long-term impacts and set the agency back substantially.

As this Committee documented during its hearings and oversight, the agency faces deep challenges. These include the considerable turnover and loss of expertise at the agency, compounded by the slow pace of FAA employees returning from remote work and insufficient employee training and mentoring. Additionally, confirming a new Administrator took 19 months and during that time, many positions throughout the agency were without permanent leadership. While some progress has been made, the regulatory process faces continuing backlogs and still needs reform and a better clarification of roles and responsibilities. All of this has hindered FAA efforts to further its global engagement during a transformative time for aviation. It is imperative that the FAA and the U.S. Congress address these challenges.

We are heartened that both the House-passed FAA Reauthorization bill and the Senate committee leadership bill, and accompanying amendments, focus on many of these key challenges and issues. We look forward to working with policymakers in a bipartisan and bicameral fashion in enacting an FAA Reauthorization that contributes to leadership, direction, and stability at the agency.

H.R. 3935 includes several provisions which we believe will strengthen the management and operation of the FAA, provide strong policy direction, and enhance aviation leadership with aviation authorities around the globe. Specifically, H.R. 3935 includes the establishment of a Deputy Administrator for Programs and Management, a Deputy Administrator for Safety and Operations, and an Associate Administrator for Rulemaking and Regulatory Improvement. This will help better manage delays in confirming new political leadership at the agency as well as facili-

¹General Aviation's Contributions to the U.S. Economy [https://gama.aero/wp-content/uploads/General_Aviation_s_Contribution_to_the_US_Economy_FINAL_20200219.pdf], 2018 Price Waterhouse Coopers Study on behalf of Aircraft Electronics Association (AEA), Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA), Experimental Aircraft Association (EAA), General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA), Helicopter Association International

²Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act, H.R. 3935, 118th Congress [https://www.congress.gov/bills/118/house-bill/3935/text?rs=9&r=1&q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22hr+3935%22%7D]

³FAA Administrator Nomination and Reauthorization Industry Letter [https://gama.aero/wp-content/uploads/FAA-Administrator-nomination-and-Reauthorization-Sept-13-2023-Association-Letter.pdf]

⁴Private Sector Management Advisory Council Letter [https://gama.aero/wp-content/uploads/Private-Sector-MAC-Request-for-FAA-Authorization-and-Appropriations-Nov-2023-Final.pdf]

tating more timely, transparent, and accountable promulgation of rulemaking, policy, guidance, and related materials. The House bill also directs reviews of the regulatory process to gain further improvements.

H.R. 3935 also encourages robust FAA leadership in global civil aviation through engagement with international civil aviation authorities to facilitate validation of product and harmonize requirements and processes with other authorities to the benefit of aviation safety and industry. The House-passed bill also requires development of an FAA strategic plan for international engagement to measure compliance with international aviation safety agreements, strengthen FAA's international offices' activity as well as improving the delivery of technical assistance. These provisions, from our perspective, will improve global civil aviation safety, environmental sustainability, and facilitate U.S. aerospace competitiveness in this dynamic era of rapid technological innovation.

H.R. 3935 includes needed direction to the FAA as our industry goes through an era of development of innovation and technology that rivals the dawn of the jet-age. For this reason, it is critical that FAA be given and simultaneously set direction and embrace technological development.

H.R. 3935 also provides direction by encouraging certification improvements through the utilization of digital tools and software. Given these methods are increasingly used in design and to document certification activity, FAA evaluating and implementing their use on a more consistent basis could evolve the current paper-driven and transactional process to a more real-time review. This would better leverage technology and have aviation safety benefits as well as facilitating efficiencies and coordination amongst applicants and the FAA.

GAMA also supports the committee's critical direction for Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) vehicles. This includes mandating a rulemaking to enable initial powered-lift operations by 2025 and a permanent regulatory framework for commercial operations and the integration and entry into the national airspace system for these vehicles within five years. Additionally, H.R. 3935 provides direction on infrastructure, including electrification, to support electric propulsion and vertical flight including the development of vertiports.

We would also like to praise the inclusion, during floor debate, of an amendment offered by Reps. Salud Carbajal, Rudy Yakym, and Sharice Davids, to create a pilot program to deliver clearances via mobile devices (e.g., tablets) through Internet Protocol. We appreciate the collaboration and support of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) on this amendment. FAA-funded trials have shown that the functionality can be enabled safely and securely and deliver fuel savings and operational efficiencies.

H.R. 3935 also underscores important workforce efforts for both FAA and industry. For example, the measure extends and strengthens critical aviation workforce development programs (Sec. 625) initially authorized in 2018 that focuses on pilots and maintenance workers while also expanding the program to add a focus on manufacturing which GAMA strongly supports. The addition of a manufacturing element to the existing program would complement the goal of improving continued operational safety for design, production, operation, and maintenance, and help build a future, more diverse workforce for the breadth of the aviation sector.

From an FAA workforce perspective, the legislation directs an FAA workforce assessment including staffing levels, competency, and skills for critical safety positions in the Flight Standards Service and Aircraft Certification Service and the promotion of expanded training opportunities to enhance FAA's technical capabilities. In addition, H.R. 3935 encourages an FAA telework policy that is based on job functions, duties, and level of management.

H.R. 3935 also highlights the ongoing Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions (EAGLE)⁵ initiative and encourages its work in the development and implementation of a safe transition to unleaded fuel for the piston-engine aircraft fleet by no later than 2030. This direction is increasingly important given the recent Environmental Protection Agency finding about lead-emissions from piston-powered aircraft fuel, also known as avgas.

GAMA has great hope that FAA Administrator Whitaker, Deputy Administrator Thomson, and the rest of the agency can make great progress in addressing these challenges. However, it is imperative that Congress use all efforts to enact, in a bipartisan and bicameral fashion, a bill to reauthorize the FAA and fully join them in these critical efforts. Again, we appreciate and applaud the action that this committee, and this body, have produced with the passage of the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act. Thank you for the opportunity to express the importance of this effort, and for your collective work to date. We look for-

⁵ Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions (EAGLE) Initiative [<https://flyeagle.org/>]

ward to working with you, and your colleagues, to provide leadership, direction, and stability to the FAA.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Colonel. Next, we have Mr. Santa.

You are recognized for 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF RICH SANTA, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS ASSOCIATION, AFL-CIO

Mr. SANTA. Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and members of the subcommittee, thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today.

NATCA, the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, is extremely pleased that the House has already taken the most important action that you can for the safety of the National Airspace System by passing a long-term, comprehensive FAA reauthorization bill with an overwhelming bipartisan majority that directly addresses several key aspects of air traffic control staffing, including requiring the FAA to use the Collaborative Resource Workgroup, the CRWG, as the basis for its controller workforce plan, and to maximize controller hiring for the duration of this bill.

I want to individually thank the Members, committee leadership, and staff who took the time to understand the critical staffing and reporting issues, evaluated and formulated the solutions consisting of max hiring and required CRWG reporting, and ultimately crafted and supported the approved language in the FAA reauthorization bill. Thank you.

There are over 1,000 fewer certified professional controllers today than there were a decade ago. Continuing to follow the same flawed model utilized by the FAA after more than a decade of missed hiring goals and missed staffing projections will continue this downward staffing trend. A new approach is desperately needed. The FAA must adopt the recently updated and more accurate operational staffing targets that were jointly developed by the Collaborative Resource Workgroup, which was comprised of the FAA's Air Traffic Organization and NATCA. The MITRE Corporation verified and validated this group's work.

The facility staffing targets the FAA utilizes today were developed almost a decade ago. It is beyond time to update them. The new CRWG staffing targets need to be used as the basis for the FAA's controller workforce plan moving forward, so that Congress and industry have a complete and accurate understanding of the condition of ATC staffing and the requirements of the NAS.

Understaffing requires the FAA to assign mandatory overtime to controllers, including 6-day workweeks, which leads to fatigue. Several FAA facilities require 6-day workweeks every single week. Air traffic control is already a highly stressful profession. Controllers that are required to work 200 hours per month amplifies that fatigue, and it inserts additional risk into the NAS as a result of this understaffing.

In June, the DOT IG issued an audit concluding that, while the United States has one of the safest air traffic systems in the world, a lack of fully certified controllers poses a potential risk to the national operations.

Earlier this month, the FAA's National Airspace System Safety Review Team concluded that, under FAA's most recent controller workforce plan that was submitted to Congress, when retirements and other attrition are accounted for, the hiring plan produces a negligible improvement over today's understaffed levels, resulting in a net increase of fewer than 200 air traffic controllers by the year 2032.

Let me repeat that: The current plan presented to you results in a net increase of fewer than 200 air traffic controllers by the year 2032.

We applaud the T&I Committee for its bill that directs the FAA to adopt controller staffing targets to resolve these issues identified by both the DOT IG and the NAS Safety Review Team.

But the FAA must also be transparent with its need for increased funding for its F&E budget. Congress has always met the FAA's stated need, but the agency has consistently requested less than it needs for runways, radar systems, towers, and all of its infrastructure.

In fact, for the past 15 years, the FAA hasn't even adjusted their request to account for normal inflation. Utilizing a fix-on-fail model has led the FAA's inability to maintain and replace critical safety equipment that has exceeded its expected life, again introducing risks into the system. The failure of the U.S. NOTAM system earlier this year was a glaring example of that risk. FAA funding requests have delayed the FAA from designing and implementing new technologies to improve safety. One such example is an airport surface surveillance awareness tool that addresses runway incursions, a top safety concern.

Finally, I want to stress the need to avoid an FAA shutdown at the end of this year that would force the FAA to suspend hiring, close its training academy, and delay modernization even more, which would be a major setback.

Thank you again for helping us to resolve these issues. I look forward to your questions.

[Mr. Santa's prepared statement follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Rich Santa, President, National Air Traffic
Controllers Association, AFL-CIO**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, AFL-CIO (NATCA) at today's hearing titled "Turbulence Ahead: Consequences of Delaying Long-Term FAA Bill."

NATCA is the exclusive representative for nearly 20,000 employees, including the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) air traffic controllers, traffic management coordinators and specialists, flight service station air traffic controllers, staff support specialists, engineers and architects, and other aviation safety professionals, as well as Department of Defense (DOD) and Federal Contract Tower (FCT) air traffic controllers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Airspace System (NAS) moves over 45,000 flights and 2.9 million passengers, and more than 59,000 tons of cargo every day across more than 29 million square miles of airspace. Although it is the safest, most efficient, and most complex system in the world, we should always strive to bolster safety, mitigate risk, and improve efficiency.

The single most important action Congress can take for the safety of the NAS would be to pass a long-term, comprehensive FAA Reauthorization bill into law before the end of the year.

NATCA applauds the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee and the House of Representatives for its passage of “Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act” (H.R. 3935) with an overwhelming bipartisan majority.

For the better part of two decades, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), like much of the federal government, has faced an unstable and unpredictable funding stream. Whether due to the risks of lapsed appropriations or authorizations, such interruptions have negatively affected all aspects of the Agency, making it increasingly difficult to maintain the safety and efficiency of the NAS.

Even when the Agency is not facing the threat of a shutdown, multiple administrations from both parties have submitted insufficient FAA budget requests to Congress. FAA’s requests have often fell well short of the resources need to meet the full needs of the NAS. Historically, Congress provides the Agency with the resources it requests through both authorization of top-line numbers and the annual appropriations process. However, because FAA consistently requested too little, there are significant backlogs of NAS system sustainment and ATC facility sustainment, in addition to mounting delays in the implementation of NAS modernization and system improvements as well as ATC tower and radar facility replacement.

Air traffic controller (ATC) staffing is another area in which this troubling dynamic persists within the FAA, as evident by the fact there are more than 1,000 fewer Certified Professional Controllers (CPC) than a dozen years ago. Continuing to follow the flawed controller staffing model developed annually by FAA’s Office of Finance and Management after more than a decade of missed hiring goals and staffing projections, followed by reduced expectations the following year would be deeply problematic. Reducing air traffic capacity due to understaffing, as FAA did this past summer in the New York airspace, undermines the efficiency of the NAS.

To further complicate matters, understaffing forces the FAA to assign mandatory overtime to controllers on a regular basis, which leads to fatigue. Fatigue, of course, also adds unnecessary risk into the NAS.

To address the persistent staffing shortage of air traffic controllers, the FAA must adopt the new, more accurate operational staffing targets developed by the Collaborative Resources Workgroup (CRWG). These staffing targets should form the basis for FAA’s annual Controller Workforce Plan (CWP) moving forward, so that Congress and the aviation industry have a complete and accurate view of the FAA’s ATC staffing needs.

We applaud the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee’s inclusion of the CRWG’s staffing targets in its long-term FAA reauthorization bill, the “Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act” (H.R. 3935), which passed the House in July with an overwhelming bipartisan majority. If FAA uses the CRWG as the basis for its CWP, Congress will finally get a complete and accurate picture of the FAA’s controller staffing needs. H.R. 3935 also provides for maximum hiring of air traffic controller trainees for the full five-year duration of the bill. This is a critical component as part of a comprehensive hiring and training strategy to meet the operational needs of the NAS.

In addition to limiting NAS capacity, understaffing also requires FAA to assign mandatory overtime to controllers on a regular basis, which leads to fatigue. Fatigue increases unnecessary risk in the NAS.

FAA must be transparent with its need for improved funding for its Facilities and Equipment (F&E) budget, which provides resources for physical infrastructure repairs and sustainment, equipment modernization, and major capital projects. NATCA estimates that FAA requires approximately \$4.5 billion for F&E activities in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, and this number will approach nearly \$6 billion in the near future. Despite this increasing need, for the past decade, FAA has consistently requested only approximately \$3 billion per year in annual appropriations.

Congress has always met the Agency’s stated need, but that has prevented FAA from meeting its own equipment sustainment, replacement, and modernization needs, creating a significant backlog. That backlog will worsen if FAA continues to submit annual budget requests that do not reflect its true needs moving forward. Failing to maintain and replace critical safety equipment that has exceeded its expected life introduces unnecessary risk into the system. Further, funding limitations prevent the FAA from designing and implementing new technologies that will improve safety, such as an airport surface surveillance situational awareness tool to address wrong surface landings—a top safety concern.

NATCA’s testimony will focus on: (1) the current controller staffing crisis and training challenges and how they could affect safety and efficiency; (2) the negative effects of equipment and infrastructure backlogs and how those affect critical mod-

ernization and infrastructure programs, including significantly delaying the development and implementation of new safety technology that will improve surface surveillance at airports and help mitigate the risks of runway incursions; and (3) the negative effects that a potential shutdown—due to a lapse in authorization or appropriations—would have on the NAS, as well as on the nearly 20,000 air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals represented by NATCA.

I. CONTROLLER STAFFING AND TRAINING HAMPERED

For years, NATCA has been alerting policymakers that the controller staffing shortage negatively affects all aspects of the NAS. Despite meeting its self-imposed air traffic controller hiring goals for much of the past decade, the FAA has not kept up with attrition. Consequently, as of the end of fiscal year (FY) 2023, there were more than 1,000 fewer CPCs employed by the FAA than at the end of FY 2012. Currently, many of FAA's fully certified controllers are working mandatory overtime hours, frequently 6-day workweeks and 10-hour days, to make up for the staffing shortage. Some have even been working those schedules for their entire careers. Over the long-term, this will continue to introduce unnecessary risk into the system.

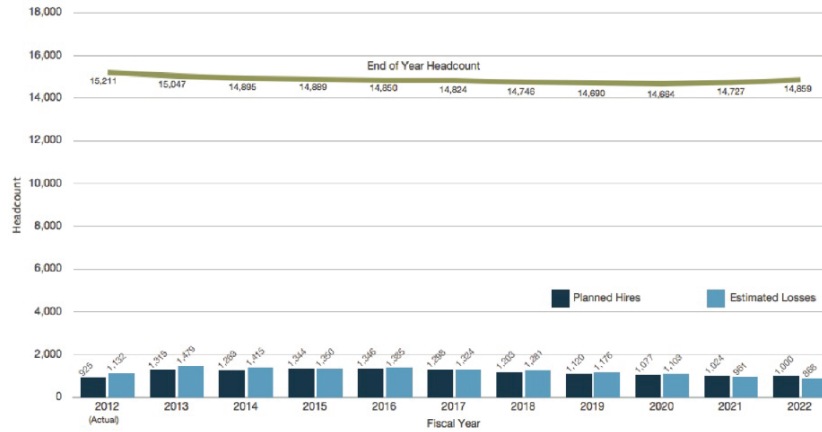
When there are too few fully certified professional controllers (CPCs), positions have to be combined, resulting in divided attention between different responsibilities. Most commonly, controller staffing shortages are mitigated through reducing efficiency—meaning flight delays. Chronically understaffed facilities also introduce unnecessary safety risks into the system.

Although the FAA has taken steps in the right direction, such as upwardly adjusting its hiring goals for each of FY 2024–2026 to 1,800 new hires, a protracted shutdown would cause immediate and irreparable harm to the FAA's near-term plans to address controller staffing. At minimum, the FAA's training academy in Oklahoma City discontinues operations during a shutdown and the students are sent home, while new classes of controller trainees in the pipeline will have their start-dates significantly delayed, leading to additional attrition among the scheduled new hires.

Even before the current funding uncertainty began, according to the FAA's Controller Workforce Plan, 40% of those who were members of a hiring class between 2014 and 2017 were removed from the FAA, resigned, or are still in training, meaning FAA can only expect about 60% of controller trainees to reach full certification within five to seven years of their hire. As a result, because it takes between one and three years for a new FAA Academy graduate to reach full certification, an increased hiring goal would take several years to have any positive effect on CPC totals. If the Academy is closed and hiring stops, the FAA's CPC shortage will become even more pronounced for the next five to seven years.

A lapse in authorization or appropriations certainly would not be the first major disruption that has harmed controller staffing levels. In 2013, across-the-board spending cuts as a result of Sequestration forced the FAA to institute a hiring freeze and shutter the FAA Academy between March and December of that year. This came at a time in which the FAA was struggling to replace retiring controllers, and the Agency has never made up for that sequester-related hiring freeze. In fact, in its 2013–22 Controller Workforce Plan, FAA stated to Congress that it planned to hire 1,315 controller trainees in 2013 and 1,263 in 2014. Yet, when it hired only 554 controller trainees in 2013, missing its target by over 700 because of sequestration, the following year it only amended its 2014 hiring target to 1,286 adding merely 23 additional new trainees—a goal it missed by over 170.

Figure 3.1: Projected Controller Workforce Controller Trends



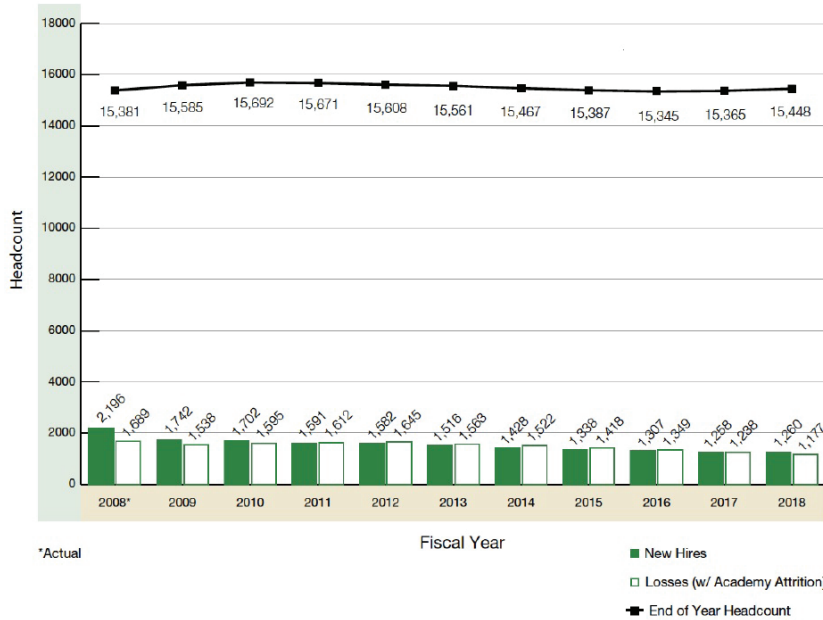
Note: Annual hires and losses are a relatively small proportion of the total controller workforce. Forecast does not include the effects of sequestration.

A Plan for the Future, 10-Year Strategy of the Air Traffic Control Workforce 2013–22, Chapter 3: Staffing Requirements, at 13.

It's also important to note that in 2013, FAA projected essentially a flat total headcount including CPCs and trainees over the next decade. Instead, it immediately missed even that modest pace in 2013, hovered between 700–800 below that goal for much of the decade, and then once COVID-19 began, fell about 1,400 behind.

But, if you go back further to the 2009 CWP, the same table showed targets of significantly more hiring and total on-board headcount of between 15,365 to 15,692 for each year over the next decade.

Figure 3.1 Projected Controller Workforce



Note: Annual hires and losses are a relatively small proportion of the controller workforce.

A Plan for the Future, 10-Year Strategy for the Air Traffic Control Workforce 2009–2018, Chapter 3: Staffing Requirements, at 12.

Sequestration also forced the FAA to issue a “save money furlough” affecting every employee, including air traffic controllers. During the week of April 21–27, 2013, delays nearly tripled at our nation’s airports, from 5,103 to 13,694, when compared to the same week the year before and the year after.

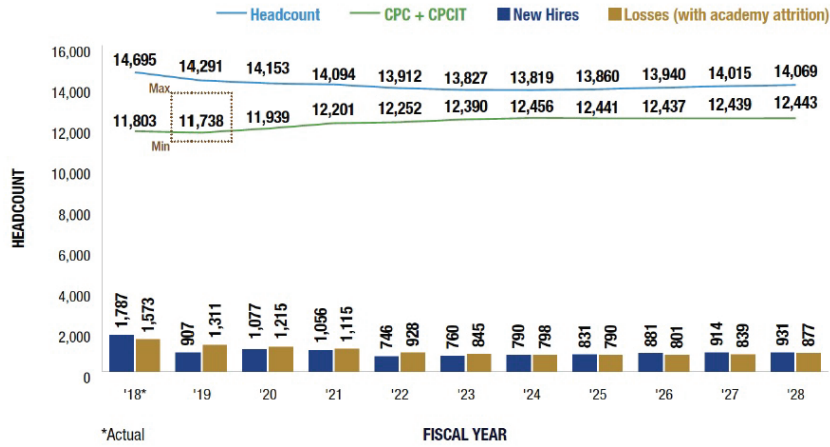
Then, again, in late Sept. 2013, because Congress had not passed appropriations bills to fund the government for FY 2014, the government was forced to shut down for 16 days shuttering much of the FAA along with it, which resulted in furloughs to FAA employees. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) estimates that these furloughs cost the government a total of \$2.5 billion.

In early 2018, Congress and the White House failed—on two separate occasions—to enact funding legislation and the government was shut down for three days between Jan. 20–22, and then again on Feb. 9. On March 23, Congress narrowly avoided its third federal government shutdown in a two-month period when it passed an omnibus spending package that funded the government and extended FAA authorization through Sept. 30, 2018. Prior to that, Congress was on its fifth consecutive CR and fifth consecutive extension to FAA authorization.

From Dec. 2018 through Jan. 2019, the NAS suffered through the longest government shutdown in U.S. history, exacerbating a controller staffing crisis that continued to go from bad to worse.

By the 2019–2028 CWP, FAA Finance had long abandoned its goals of approximately 15,500 total on-board headcount including CPCs and trainees from a decade earlier and even abandoned the total on-board headcount including CPCs and trainees from 2013 of approximately 14,800. Without justification or explanation, it had adjusted that target all the way down to under 14,000. What prompted this reduced staffing target? Only FAA Finance can answer that question, but you won’t find it in any CWP. Instead, you only will find justification for a new headcount number each year, because presumably FAA Finance assumes Congress will not compare past CWPs or notice its consistent failure to meet its stated hiring targets and goals.

FIGURE 3.1 PROJECTED CONTROLLER TRENDS



*Actual
Air Traffic Control Workforce Plan 2019–2028, Chapter 3: Staffing Requirements, at 15.

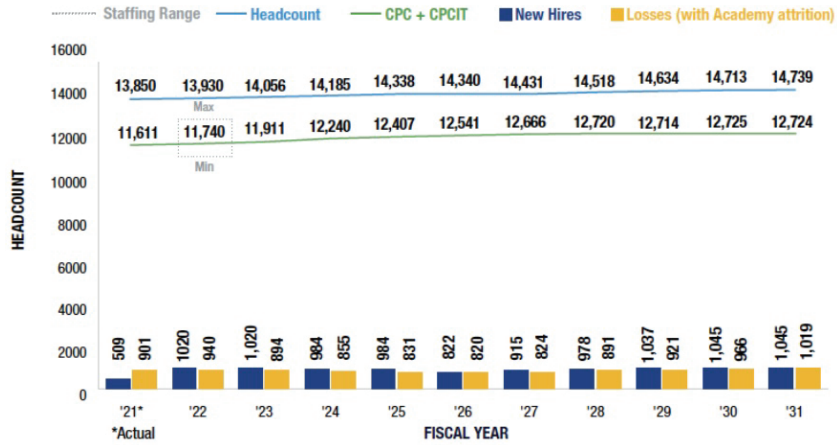
Fourteen months later, the COVID–19 Pandemic forced the FAA to close its training Academy again and, even after it reopened, enrollment capacity was reduced by 50% to maintain health and safety protocols.

Although FAA reduced its hiring goals in three different years (2013, 2019, and 2021) reacting to a major disruption, the Agency curiously chose not to increase its hiring goals in the following year even though it has significantly more capacity at the Academy to do so. See Staffing Fact Sheet (Appendix B).

A longitudinal review of FAA’s CWPs from 2009 through 2021 reveals that FAA Finance has always projected that FAA only needs approximately the same number of controllers that it has at that moment in time (Appendix C). As it consistently missed its hiring targets and otherwise failed to keep up with attrition, the on-board controller number has decreased throughout that time. FAA Finance consistently said it only needs the new, lower controller headcount number each year and looking forward over the next decade. The long-term effect of this practice has led to the FAA’s current state: an untenable one in which many controllers work mandatory 10-hour days, and six-day workweeks. Those requirements are based on a system that FAA Finance created of its own device. And, it’s one they most likely would have continued but for the scrutiny of this Subcommittee in recent years.

By 2022, after the staffing attrition due to the pandemic, FAA finally acknowledged it needed more controllers and reset its long-term target by 2031 back to 14,739, essentially what it said FAA needed back in 2012. But, having never reached its prior targets and only driving those numbers down year after year after year, NATCA and this Subcommittee have no guarantee that FAA will maintain this new target for the remainder of the next decade, given its consistent practice to change its plan in each of the previous 15 years.

FIGURE 3.1 PROJECTED CONTROLLER TRENDS



Air Traffic Control Workforce Plan 2022–2031, Chapter 3: Staffing Requirements, at 15.

Moreover, we know from the last shutdown that some of our most experienced controllers decided to retire, while others tendered their resignations well-short of their retirement age to meet their financial obligations and provide for their families. Cumulatively, these delays to controller training, early retirements, and unexpected attrition wreak havoc on controller staffing throughout the system.

Recognizing that controller staffing is a major problem for the FAA, in Dec. 2022, then-Acting Administrator Billy Nolen directed the FAA’s Air Traffic Organization (ATO) to restart the CRWG and partner with NATCA to collaboratively determine the number of CPCs needed to meet operational, statutory, and contractual requirements, including resources to develop, evaluate, and implement processes and initiatives affecting the NAS. In the weeks that followed, the parties diligently worked with the MITRE Corporation’s Center for Advanced Aviation System Development to develop CPC operational staffing targets at each of FAA’s 313 air traffic control facilities. The CRWG completed its work at the end of January and presented its report to the then-Acting Administrator and NATCA President in mid-February. The FAA has not yet adopted the jointly developed CRWG’s CPC targets as the basis for its annual CWP to provide Congress and the aviation industry with a more complete and transparent view of FAA’s operational workforce needs.

We hope that new FAA Administrator Michael Whitaker will recognize the important collaborative work done by the FAA and NATCA and adopt the CRWG’s targets, while dispensing with the failed FAA Finance model.

As we highlighted above, the current CWP is flawed because it relies on a “finance driven” staffing model that the FAA uses to develop facility-by-facility staffing. That model, developed by FAA’s Office of Finance and Management (AFN or FAA Finance) incorrectly combines CPCs and CPC-ITs (controllers who were fully certified at a previous facility but are “in training” and not yet fully certified at their new facility). The CWP also ignores existing CPC staffing targets that were developed nearly ten years ago, which the reconstituted CRWG report updated based on current needs. Most importantly, it rejects FAA’s own Air Traffic Organization’s analysis that the system is severely understaffed.

The Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General (DOT OIG) issued a report in June that agreed with the CRWG’s analysis. The DOT OIG’s Audit Report AV2023035, titled “FAA Faces Controller Staffing Challenges as Air Traffic Operations Return to Pre-Pandemic Levels at Critical Facilities” concluded that “while the United States has one of the safest air traffic systems in the world, the lack of fully certified controllers, operational supervisors, and traffic management coordinators pose a potential risk to air traffic operations.” DOT OIG Audit Report at 18.

Regarding controllers, the DOT IG wrote, “FAA continues to face staffing challenges and lacks a plan to address them, *which in turn poses a risk to the continuity of air traffic operations.*” DOT OIG Audit Report at 6 (*emphasis added*). For example, the DOT IG “determined that 20 of 26 (77 percent) critical facilities are staffed

below the Agency’s 85-percent threshold” and that “managers we interviewed at 16 of the 17 facilities likewise told us their facilities were not adequately staffed. For example, at several facilities, controllers were working mandatory overtime and 6-day work weeks to cover staff shortages.” DOT OIG Audit Report at 5, 8.

The FAA’s National Airspace System Safety Review Team (SRT) report, issued earlier this month reinforces what NATCA has been saying about air traffic control staffing for a decade when it wrote that “these issues are eroding the margin of safety and injecting risk into the system, and the ATO must take action to urgently address this staffing crisis.”

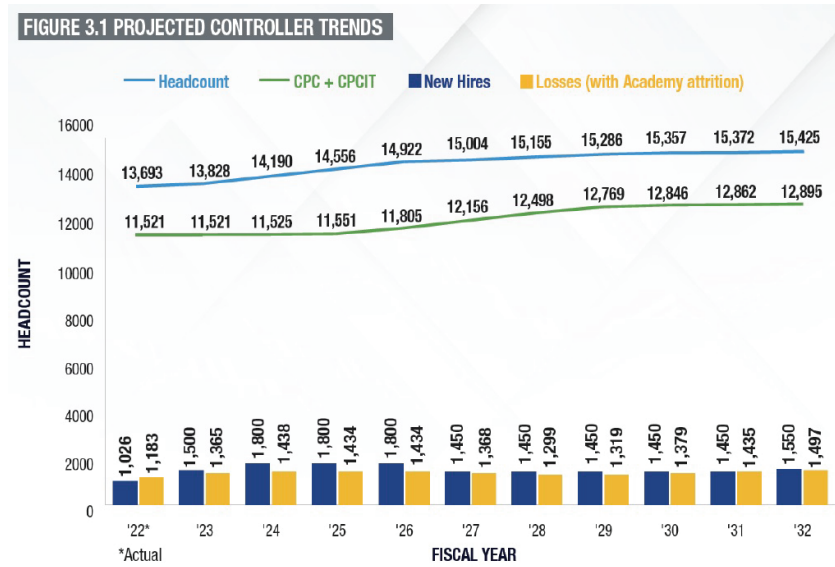
The SRT found that controller staffing shortages lead to diminished air traffic capacity and inefficient operations. The SRT also found that overtime is at historically high levels, as a result of the staffing shortage, concluding that it introduces additional risk into the NAS.

The SRT reinforced what the Department of Transportation Inspector General concluded in its audit issued this past June when it concluded, “FAA has made limited efforts to ensure adequate controller staffing at critical air traffic control facilities.”

The SRT found that “when retirements and other attrition is accounted for, the [FAA’s] hiring plan produces a negligible improvement over today’s understaffed levels, resulting in a net increase of fewer than 200 air traffic controllers by 2032. The [Air Traffic Organization] must determine staffing needs based on actual system needs rather than on Academy throughput and budgetary constraints.”

Without rationale, in its 2023–32 CWP, FAA Finance revised its staffing targets upward after the CRWG issued its report. Not coincidentally, it also was after the T&I Committee and Senate Commerce Committee both introduced legislative language to require the FAA to adopt the CRWG targets as the basis for the CWP. Nevertheless, FAA Finance continued with its intentionally misleading blending of CPCs and CPC-ITs into one group, despite pending legislation that requires them to report both groups separately.

As soon as Congress inevitably turns its attention to other pressing matters, NATCA is concerned that FAA Finance will begin lowering its targets again consistent with past practice.



Air Traffic Control Workforce Plan 2023–2032, Chapter 3: Staffing Requirements, at 15.

Referencing the above chart, notice that FAA Finance now believes it needs over 15,400 total headcount (not the 13,800 total headcount it thought it needed just a few years ago). This is the same total it needed, and had, in 2009, but the Agency won’t be able to achieve those totals for probably another decade due to the failures of its finance-driven staffing model.

This is entirely disingenuous, because FAA has needed that many total controllers the entire time and FAA Finance intentionally reduced the targets every year until Congress was forced to intervene in recent years.

Continuing to follow FAA Finance’s hiring plan—constructed by a line of business that has no experience operating or managing the air traffic system—after more than a decade of missed goals, incorrect projections, and reduced expectations is a fool’s errand.

II. CASCADING DELAYS TO CRITICAL MODERNIZATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMS JEOPARDIZE SAFETY OF THE NAS

Stop-and-go funding negatively affects critical modernization and infrastructure programs such as delaying development, testing, and implementation of new technologies, as well as delaying the sustainment and repair of existing safety-critical equipment. Delays to these types of programs have real world consequences.

Each year, the NAS experiences hundreds of safety events such as wrong-surface landings and runway incursions. It is important to note that a shutdown of the FAA would significantly delay development, testing, and implementation of a new surface surveillance situational awareness tool that will help controllers identify and detect when and where aircraft and ADS-B equipped vehicles are on airport surfaces.

Although it is still in its infancy of development, this situational awareness tool would fulfill a similar role as the Airport Surface Detection System—Model X (ASDE-X) and Airport Surface Surveillance Capability (ASSC) at airports that do not currently have any surface surveillance technology. However, unlike ASDE-X and ASSC, this tool would be limited only to visual indicators and will not include “safety logic” enhancements, which is the predictive software that alerts controllers and provides an audible alarm as soon as the safety risk is detected by the program.

To draw a parallel to motor vehicle technology, these tools are similar to the differences in a car’s blind spot warning system. Today, many cars have some form of blind spot detection system. Some systems provide a warning light, an audible alarm, and automatic collision assistance, while other systems simply provide a flashing light on a side mirror. Both systems help prevent vehicle accidents, and although one certainly provides more redundancy than the other, both are significantly safer than what drivers had access to prior to the first such system in 2001.

As of today, only 44 airports across the NAS have either ASDE-X or ASSC, and despite being a recent technological upgrade, these programs are in a sustainment-only posture within the FAA. The FAA does not have the funding nor contractual capability to expand these programs to new facilities. As a result, the aviation industry, NATCA, and the FAA began working on the development and implementation of a situational awareness tool to help air traffic controllers mitigate these risks.

The successful and timely implementation of this situational awareness tool likely will hinge on two factors: the availability of sufficient funding for this program, and an intentional acceleration of the FAA’s acquisitions management process so that this tool can reach air traffic facilities sooner rather than later. Even if these formidable hurdles are cleared, the current timeline for first-facility installation is June 2024, at the earliest. Any delays to FAA authorization, funding disruptions, or budgetary shortfalls, including a flat Facilities and Equipment (F&E) budget due to a long-term Continuing Resolution, will delay this timeline significantly.

Moreover, in the event of a delay to FAA authorization or further funding disruptions, the programs listed below will experience the following negative effects, just to name a few:

- *En Route Automation Modernization (ERAM)*—Testing and build deployment at air traffic facilities must be rescheduled, which will cause delays.
- *Standard Terminal Automation Replacement (STARS)*—Deployment of a new wrong surface alerting tool known as Arrival Runway Verification (ARV) will be delayed.
- *DataComm*—Facility training at Jacksonville Center (ZJX) and Fort Worth Center (ZFW) would stop and additional classes would be necessary. Cleveland Center (ZOB) implementation would be delayed approximately 60 days.
- *Enterprise Information Display Systems (E-IDS)*—Software testing events must be delayed.
- *Airspace*—New instrument procedure development will be negatively affected, although the extent of the harm and the length of the delay will vary depending on each facility’s ability to adjust to a new timeline.

During a shutdown, work on Voluntary Safety Reporting Programs (VSRPs), which provide for critical communication between air traffic safety action program review teams and furloughed staff, is deferred, resulting in the inability to properly

identify and mitigate safety and training deficiencies. The safety reporting program for NATCA represented engineers and service area support staff also does not operate; all work on existing reported safety issues and associated mitigation activities is suspended during a shutdown.

The FAA is behind schedule and continues to suffer through budgetary shortfalls on many critical modernization and infrastructure programs. Over the past 14 years, the FAA's F&E budget has not kept pace with inflation. In FY 2009, the F&E budget was \$2.942 billion. It subsequently was lower than that in each fiscal year through 2017, before it peaked at \$3.3 billion in FY 2018. However, since then it has remained just above or below \$3 billion. Estimating for a modest 2% average annual inflation rate over the last 14 years, the FAA's F&E budget should be over \$3.8 billion based on its 2009 budget.

This loss of spending and buying power for modernization and infrastructure programs forced FAA into a "fix-on-fail" model by requiring it to prioritize mandatory costs such as subscription services and leases, basic ATC facility sustainment, salaries, travel, and major support contracts, along with NAS system sustainment. This prioritization leaves little to no money for important programs such as ATC facility replacement, the NAS facility sustainment backlog, the NAS system sustainment backlog, NAS system improvements, radar and surveillance sustainment and replacement, and Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) and Terminal Radar Approach Control facility (TRACON) consolidation, just to name a few.

NATCA was pleased to see the Biden Administration's budget request for \$3.46 billion for F&E for FY 2024, which in addition to \$1 billion from the Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA) for facilities meets FAA's \$4.5 billion need in FY 2024. We support the Senate's Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) appropriations bill that would meet this need for the time being. We are concerned, however, because NATCA projects FAA's F&E budget will need to be increased between to \$5.5 and \$6 billion in the near future, and the IIJA funding will expire at the end of FY 2027.

In the coming years, FAA also will face unprecedented technological challenges. The continued development and rapid proliferation of advanced air mobility, drones, and other new entrants could jeopardize NAS safety and efficiency if not integrated properly. NATCA must be involved in all discussions surrounding the safe and efficient integration of these programs.

III. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF A SHUTDOWN ON AVIATION SAFETY

We know first-hand the kind of irreparable harm that a shutdown would have on the NAS because we have experienced them numerous times over the past two decades. In only the past five years, we have experienced three government shutdowns, while enduring 19 additional threatened lapses in appropriations, four threatened lapses in FAA authorization, and a narrowly averted debt ceiling crisis this past summer. *See Appendix A.*

For example, the 35-day government shutdown from Dec. 2018 through Jan. 2019 eroded critical layers necessary to support and maintain the safety of the NAS. When the longest shutdown in U.S. history finally ended, the NAS—as well as the frontline FAA workforce represented by NATCA—was on the verge of unravelling, as many programs that reduce risk and increase safety completely stopped.

NATCA members work hard to mitigate distractions and reduce fatigue in our workforce, but shutdowns increase fatigue and create unnecessary distractions for controllers while they are working airplanes. The added pressure and stress that a shutdown introduces into the NAS is intense.

During this lengthy shutdown, many air traffic controllers were understandably distracted because they were thinking about the shutdown and how they would struggle to pay their mortgages, car payments, and other household expenses. Federal employees are paid bi-weekly and by the time the shutdown ended, they had missed more than two-full pay periods of income. To earn income and take care of their families, in addition to performing their regular stressful duties of separating and sequencing traffic, some controllers also were driving an Uber or Lyft or waiting tables before and after their FAA shifts.

Air traffic control is a complex, high-consequence occupation requiring multiple layers of safety processes and procedures (i.e., safety reporting, quality control, quality assurance, training) to ensure we deliver the highest level of safety to the flying public. Many of these supporting functions are suspended during a shutdown because they do not meet the criteria to continue operating during a lapse in appropriations. You would never ask a surgeon to perform a surgery without their surgical team. As such, you also should not ask controllers to perform their critical safety work without their support team.

NATCA is extremely concerned about the negative and cumulative effects that a shutdown next year would have on the current controller staffing crisis and training challenges.

Unlike air traffic controllers who continue to work without pay during a shutdown, NATCA also represents approximately 3,000 additional aviation safety professionals who would be furloughed, and whose critical safety work is not performed. For instance, NATCA represents FAA staff support specialists who work at air traffic control facilities to provide tactical, strategic, and administrative support for training; quality assurance/quality control of air traffic control and traffic management; manage and redesign airspace and air traffic control procedures; support operational automation, military operations, and air traffic safety management systems.

NATCA also represents aircraft certification engineers, who assist in design, production approvals, and airworthiness certification of aircraft and their components, as well as aerospace engineers who design and construct critical infrastructure necessary for safe flight operations including air traffic control towers, radar maintenance and installation, navigational aids, and communications systems. These FAA employees are furloughed during a shutdown and are prohibited from completing their important work.

Moreover, beyond the immediate harms to controller staffing and the frontline workforce, shutdowns also delay the implementation of critical modernization technology, as well as the sustainment and repair of existing safety-critical equipment. For instance, certain programs would experience significant negative effects because of a shutdown such as En Route Automation Modernization (ERAM), Standard Terminal Automation Replacement (STARS), DataComm, Enterprise Information Display Systems (E-IDS), and multiple airspace modernization efforts at individual facilities across the NAS. A shutdown also will significantly delay development, testing, and implementation of a new situational awareness tool that will help controllers identify, detect, and mitigate runway incursions on airport surfaces.

IV. CONCLUSION

To enhance aviation safety, Congress must pass a long-term, comprehensive FAA Reauthorization bill by the end of the year that directs the FAA to adopt the CRWG operational staffing targets and provides for maximum hiring of air traffic controller trainees to meet those operational needs. It must also ensure that FAA addresses its backlog of equipment maintenance, repair, and replacement. Further, Congress must avoid another harmful government shutdown and ensure robust FAA funding levels, especially for the operations and F&E budgets, so that the FAA and NATCA can continue their critical safety and modernization work.

We thank the Transportation & Infrastructure Committee and the Subcommittee on Aviation for its commitment to transparent controller staffing through the adoption of the CRWG CPC staffing targets in its FAA reauthorization bill and for the foresight to require controller “max hiring” to accomplish these critical goals.

NATCA looks forward to working members of this Committee, as well as all other Members of Congress who are off committee, aviation stakeholders, and the FAA to achieve these and many other mutually beneficial goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

APPENDIX A—HISTORICAL SHUTDOWN TIMELINE

2007–2015

- Congress temporarily extended FAA authorization 23 times, while the system endured a partial FAA shutdown due to a lapse in authorization, a government-wide shutdown due to a lapse in appropriations, sequestration mandated across-the-board spending cuts, air traffic controller furloughs that caused crippling flight delays, and a hiring freeze, as well as numerous threatened shutdowns.

2018

- January 20–22: THREE DAY SHUTDOWN.
- February 9: SHUTDOWN.
- March 23: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- March 31: Threatened lapse in FAA authorization.
- October 1: Threatened lapse in FAA authorization.
- October 7: Threatened lapse in FAA authorization.
- December 7: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 22: 35-DAY SHUTDOWN.

2019

- February 15: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- October 1: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- November 21: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 20: Threatened lapse in appropriations.

2020

- October 1: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 11: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 21: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 27: Threatened lapse in appropriations.

2021

- September 30: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 3: Threatened lapse in appropriations.

2022

- February 18: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- March 11: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- September 30: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 14: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 23: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 30: Threatened lapse in appropriations.

2023

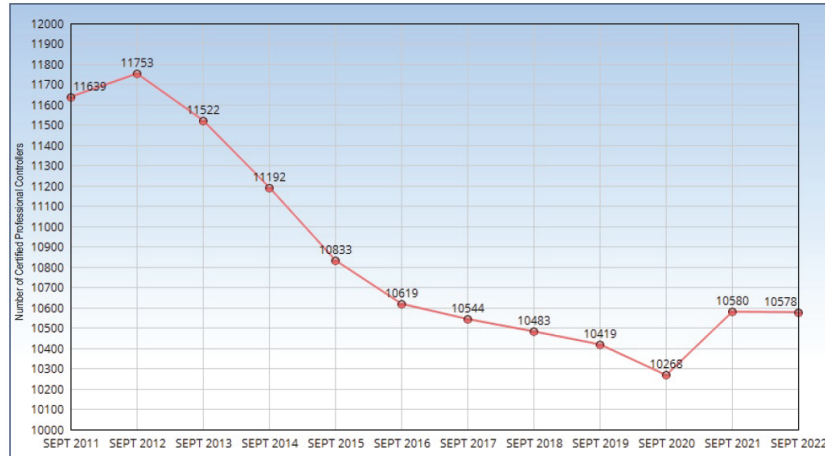
- June 2023: Debt ceiling crisis narrowly averted.
- October 1: Threatened lapse in appropriations & FAA authorization.
- November 17: Threatened lapse in appropriations.
- December 31: FAA AUTHORIZATION EXPIRES.

2024

- January 19: GOVERNMENT FUNDING EXPIRES.

APPENDIX B—STAFFING FACT SHEET

Air Traffic Controller Staffing: 2011-2022



	FISCAL YEAR											
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
On-Board	15,236	15,063	14,461	14,059	14,010	14,050	14,009	14,285	14,193	13,830	13,715	13,418
CPC	11,639	11,753	11,522	11,192	10,833	10,619	10,544	10,483	10,419	10,268	10,580	10,578
CPC-IT	965	1,143	1,187	1,200	1,218	1,259	1,205	1,320	1,414	1,309	1,031	943
DEV (Including AG)	2,632	2,167	1,741	1,667	1,959	2,172	2,260	2,482	2,360	2,253	2,104	1,897
AG	676	671	440	665	936	878	883	980	882	873	917	643
Retirement Eligible	3,064	3,224	3,077	2,982	3,355	2,915	2,410	1,842	1,004	1,143	-1,000	631
FAA Planned To Hire	829	981	1,315	1,286	1,772	1,619	1,781	1,701	1,431†	910	910‡	1,020
FAA Actually Hired	824	925	554	1,112	1,345	1,680	1,880	1,786	1,010	920	510	1,026

Source: FAA Finance Staffing Data Snapshot

† FAA reduced its FY 2019 hiring target from 1,431 to 907 following the 35-day government shutdown.

‡ FAA reduced its FY 2021 hiring target from 910 to 500 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased its hiring targets for FY 2022-2024.

These data are prior to the Collaborative Resource Workgroup's recommendation to establish new CPC staffing targets for FAA's 313 air traffic control facilities.

CPC: Certified Professional Controller

CPC-IT: Certified Professional Controller in Training (fully certified elsewhere, transferred to a new facility and began training there)

DEV: Developmental (trainee)

AG: Graduate of the FAA Initial Classroom Training Academy in Oklahoma City, newly hired, and started at their first facility as a trainee

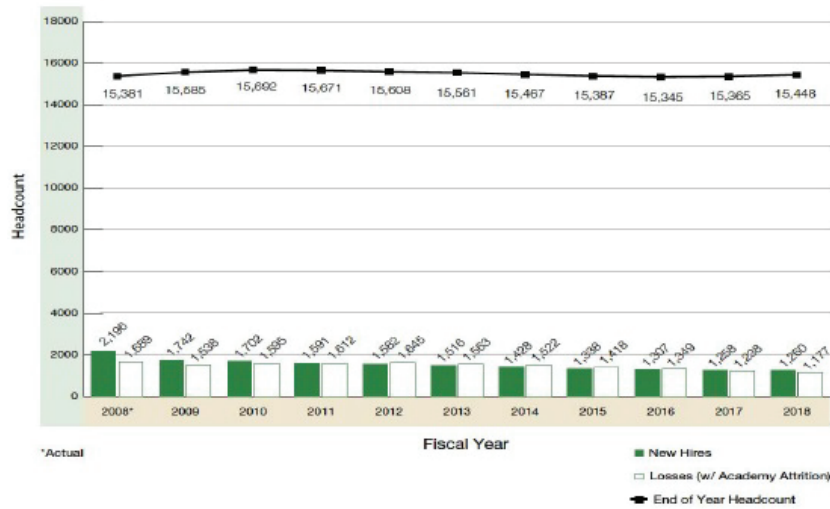
APPENDIX C

Figure 3.1 from FAA's Annual Controller Workforce Plans 2009-2023 (except 2010)
 Projecting Future Air Traffic Controller Hiring, Losses, and Total Certified Professional Controllers
 plus trainees (total headcount), and Certified Professional Controllers plus Certified Professional
 Controllers in Training (2014-2023)

2009-2018:

Figure 3.1] shows the expected end-of-year headcount, losses and new hires by year through FY 2018. Figures for FY 2008 represent actual end-of-year headcount, losses and hires.

Figure 3.1 Projected Controller Workforce



NOTE: Annual hires and losses are a relatively small proportion of the controller workforce.

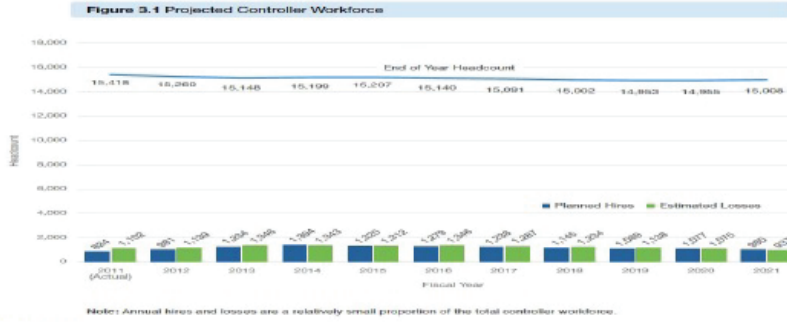
2011-2020:

Figure 3.1 Projected Controller Workforce

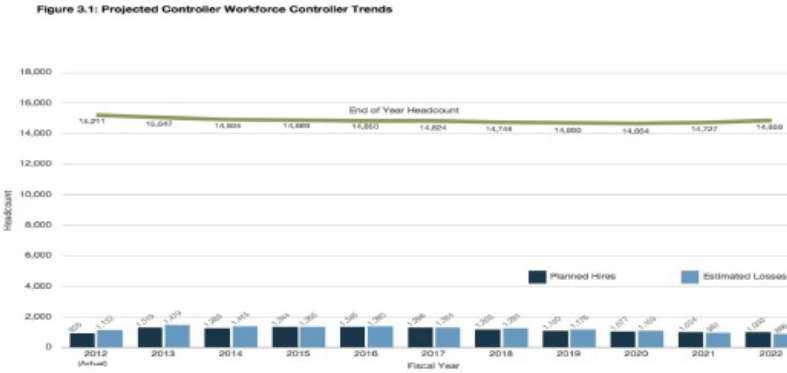


Note: Annual hires and losses are a relatively small proportion of the total controller workforce.

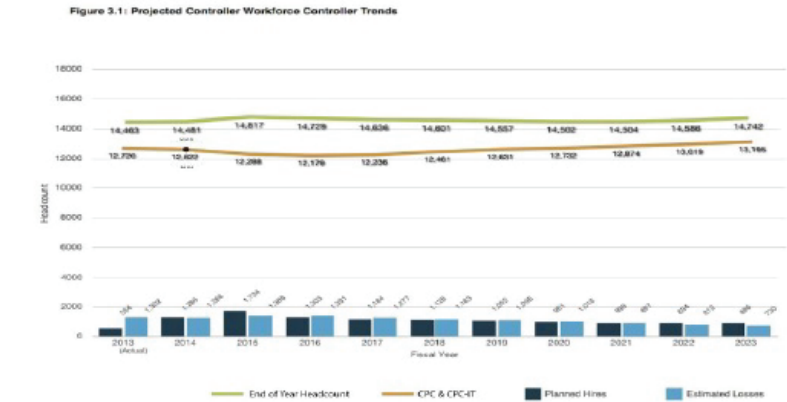
2012-2021:



2013-2022:

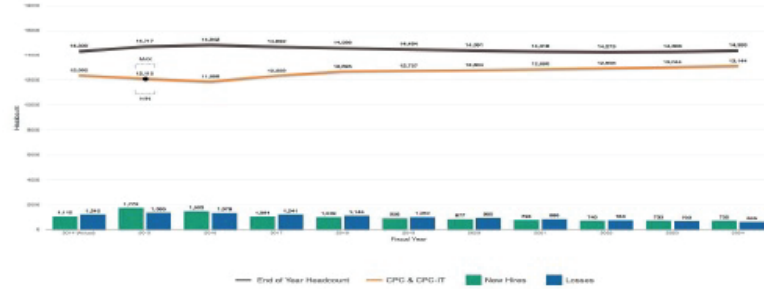


2014-2023:



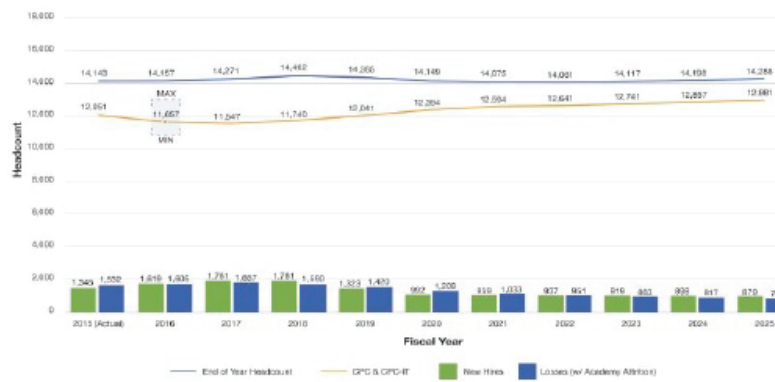
2015-2024:

Figure 3.1: Projected Controller Workforce Trends



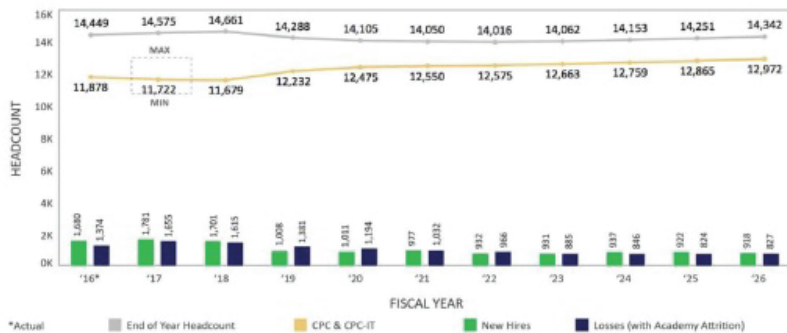
2016-2025:

FIGURE 3.1 PROJECTED CONTROLLER TRENDS



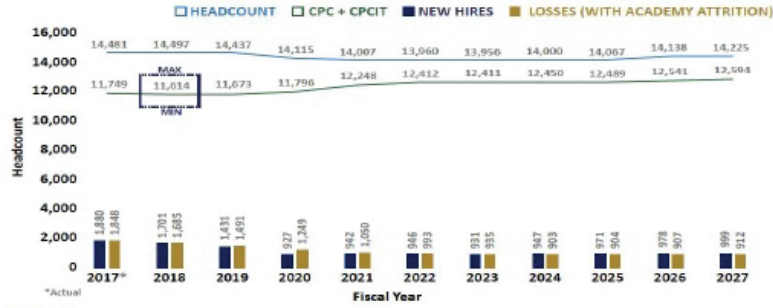
2017-2026:

FIGURE 3.1 - Projected Controller Trends



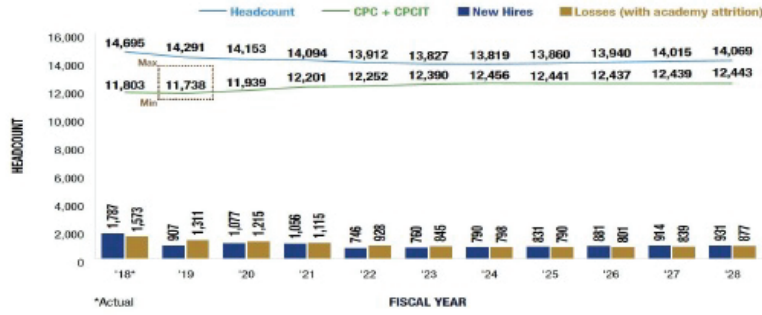
2018-2027:

FIGURE 3.1 | PROJECTED CONTROLLER TRENDS



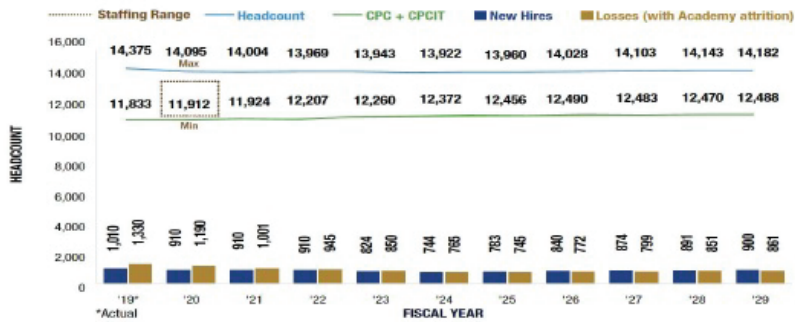
2019-2028:

FIGURE 3.1 PROJECTED CONTROLLER TRENDS

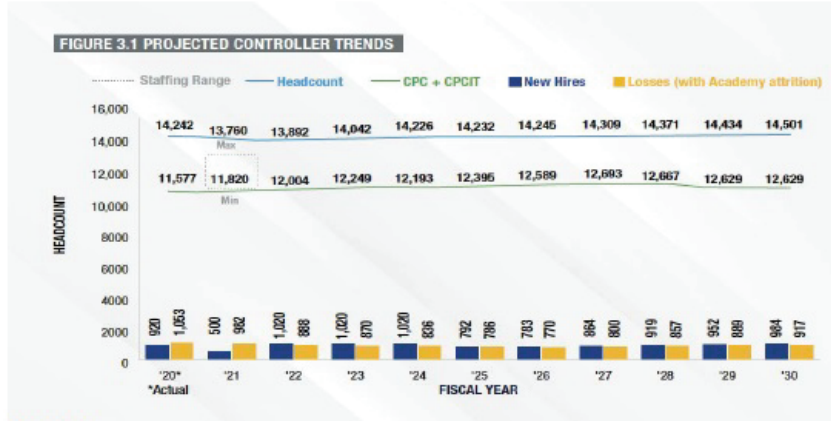


2020-2029:

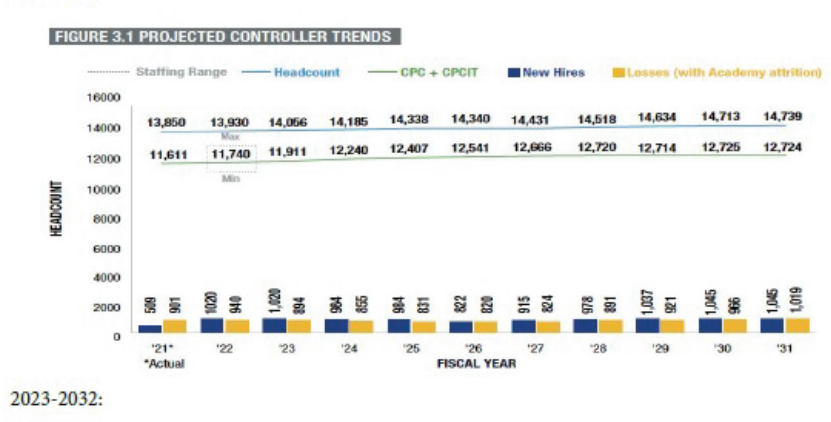
FIGURE 3.1 PROJECTED CONTROLLER TRENDS



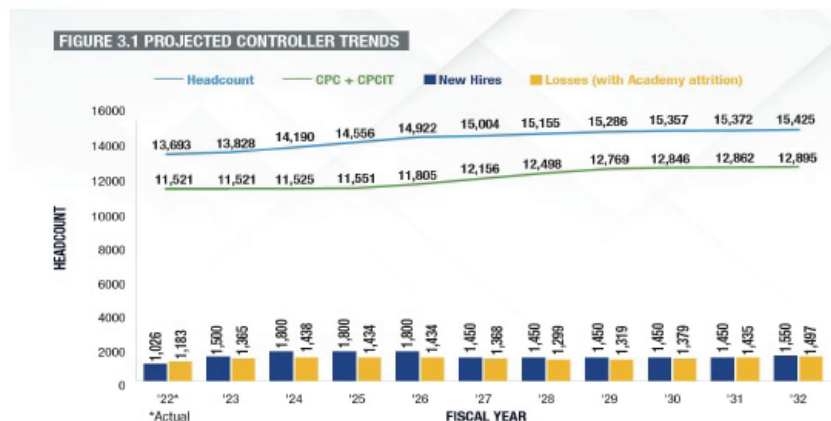
2021-2030:



2022-2031:



2023-2032:



Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Santa, for being here. We know this is the beginning of a very busy period for you.

Mr. Bradbury, you are recognized for 5 minutes, please.

**TESTIMONY OF PAUL BRADBURY, P.E., AIRPORT DIRECTOR,
PORTLAND INTERNATIONAL JETPORT, ON BEHALF OF THE
AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF AIRPORT EXECUTIVES**

Mr. BRADBURY. Good morning, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of AAAE. It is truly an honor to be here.

I serve as vice chair of AAAE's Federal Affairs Committee, and in my day job I lead the Portland International Jetport in Portland, Maine, a vibrant and growing small-hub airport. I have been at the airport, PWM, for more than 30 years, the last 15 as airport director.

First, I want to say thank you to the leaders and members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for developing and passing meaningful bipartisan FAA reauthorization legislation through the House. Chairmen Graves and Graves and Ranking Members Larsen and Cohen deserve immense credit for their leadership. The overwhelming votes in committee and on the House floor are a testament to the strong consensus that exists for this important legislation.

For airports, the House bill increases Federal investment after decades of static, authorized funding levels, and makes important programmatic changes. These investments will fund improvements from tarmacs to terminals, enhancing safety, modernizing airport facilities, and increasing capacity while reducing environmental impacts.

With safety concerns on the forefront, I want to emphasize that additional AIP resources will help airports upgrade runways, taxiways, and lighting to mitigate runway incursions and enhance safety. These investments on the ground complement efforts in the bill to enhance capabilities in the skies by adding to the controller workforce and upgrading technology. Both are important and extremely necessary.

We also appreciate your work to reduce redtape, promote small community air service, improve the Contract Tower Program, expand the aviation workforce, and protect the environment.

Airport executives are encouraged by the action that the committee has taken, but we are concerned about the looming December 31st deadline for enacting a long-term FAA bill. The Nation's aviation system is too important to leave on autopilot or to interrupt funding and unnecessarily increase costs. The challenges that the current uncertainty creates are evident at my airport and others, with limited construction seasons and tight operational windows to complete projects.

In Portland, we need to commence projects in early spring and complete them by the end of September. Even a small delay can postpone a project until the next construction season, since operationally we can't begin a project that won't be paved and ready for operation by the time paving plants close in the fall. This upcoming construction season is critical at Portland, as we are reconstructing our taxiway Alpha, the parallel taxiway for our primary runway that moves aircraft from the runways to our terminal

apron. The project must start on time, and has not only a tight seasonal weather schedule, but a tight operational schedule due to our extremely busy summer tourism season. Already we are coordinating the project construction schedule with our airline partners, which must adjust their flight schedules and aircraft to accommodate the project.

My taxiway project is an example of just one airport. It is not unique. There are many airports with similar critical airfield infrastructure projects that can't move forward without the certainty of funding availability. Ultimately, this means projects that improve system efficiency and safety could be deferred. Sadly, this is not the first time airports have been challenged by short-term extensions and continuing resolutions.

I will be blunt. It is not cost effective, practical, or in some cases, even possible to construct a project based on funding uncertainty or based on arbitrary partial year allotments. It is hard to buy half an air rescue firefighting truck or use only half of our short construction season.

Surprisingly, some of the largest expenses on our major airfield projects are startup costs, which amount to 15 to 20 percent of overall costs. Our contractors must have their equipment, safety/security fencing/barriers, materials, and support facilities onsite and ready to go before construction begins. If the project is delayed, forcing contractors to remobilize in the next construction season, the costs are doubled. When you multiply these impacts across hundreds of airports, the effects are significant: increased costs, delayed or deferred projects, and numerous operational challenges.

Mr. Chairman, the aviation industry is in a period of intense challenge and opportunity. We need long-term certainty to plan, prepare, and build projects that increase efficiency and enhance safety. Our passengers, users, and communities expect and deserve these necessary investments. We are grateful for your work toward that end and appreciate the opportunity to be here today. Thank you.

[Mr. Bradbury's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Paul Bradbury, P.E., Airport Director, Portland International Jetport, on behalf of the American Association of Airport Executives

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to participate in this hearing on the consequences of delaying a long-term Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization bill. It is an honor for me to be with you today.

My name is Paul Bradbury, and I am the Airport Director of the Portland International Jetport (PWM)—a vibrant and growing small hub commercial service airport in the largest city in the great state of Maine, affectionately known as “Vacationland.” We had almost 983,000 enplanements in 2022. With increasing numbers of business and leisure passengers, especially during the busy summer travel season, we expect that our 2023 enplanements will total nearly 1.1 million and be in line with the record we set in 2019.

I am testifying today on behalf of the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE), where I proudly serve as a Vice Chair of the association's Federal Affairs Committee. AAAE is the world's largest professional organization representing individuals who manage and operate more than 875 public-use commercial and general aviation (GA) airports across the country.

While I am eager to highlight some of the disruptions that temporary extensions of FAA programs have on my airport and others across the country, I would note that the National Airspace System Review Team recently issued a report that documents how unpredictable funding adversely impacts system safety and efficiency. It also highlights issues with air traffic controller staffing and the disruption to necessary equipment upgrades.

The independent report points out that the start-and-stop funding “makes it extremely difficult for the FAA to effectively conduct long-term business planning and execution.” With traffic levels growing and operations becoming ever more complex across the national airspace system, Congress shouldn’t be content to leave the FAA operating on autopilot or interrupt funding for critical programs especially while the agency and aviation stakeholders continue to focus on aviation safety.

Unfortunately, repeated short-term FAA extensions have been the norm in recent years. The resulting funding disruptions are particularly hard on PWM and other airports in locations with short construction seasons, and I applaud this subcommittee’s efforts to get an FAA reauthorization bill enacted into law as soon as possible. AAAE and airports across the country are eager to continue working with you to achieve that goal and to avoid disruptions in infrastructure investments and policy initiatives aimed at enhancing aviation safety, improving the passenger experience, and promoting increased efficiency across the aviation system.

H.R. 3935, THE SECURING GROWTH AND ROBUST LEADERSHIP IN AMERICAN AVIATION ACT

Mr. Chairman, let me begin by commending and thanking you, Chairman Sam Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for your outstanding work in crafting H.R. 3935, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act, and for shepherding it through the House prior to the initial expiration of FAA programs on September 30. The fact that your bipartisan bill sailed through the full committee with unanimous approval and received overwhelming bipartisan support on the House floor is a testament to the determination and leadership of the committee.

The FAA reauthorization bill is a shining example of how lawmakers can reach across the aisle, find common ground, and work together to produce strong, forward-looking, bipartisan legislation. The T&I Committee has a rich history of working collaboratively to develop and advance meaningful legislation. The leaders and members of the committee deserve immense credit and our gratitude for honoring that tradition and legacy.

The legislation developed by this committee is strongly supported by the airport community and would benefit the entire aviation industry. After the House approved the measure in June, full committee Chairman Graves correctly pointed out that the legislation will improve “the safety of our system, our airport infrastructure, and the quality of service for passengers.”

I completely agree with that summary and his further assessment that the legislation includes key provisions that will help address the shortage of pilots, air traffic controllers, mechanics, and other aviation workers. That’s a top priority for the entire aviation industry and particularly for smaller commercial service airports that have experienced air service reductions due, in part, to the shortage of commercial airline pilots.

HELPING COMMERCIAL SERVICE AND GENERAL AVIATION AIRPORTS

Airport Infrastructure Funding: H.R. 3935 includes an extensive list of provisions to help commercial service and GA airports. AAAE and Airports Council International–North America (ACI–NA) have made increasing funding for airport infrastructure projects one of our top priorities for the FAA bill. Airports appreciate that the House-passed measure proposes to increase annual Airport Improvement Program (AIP) funding from \$3.35 billion to \$4 billion annually and authorize \$100 million per year for supplemental AIP discretionary grants.

Increasing AIP funding will help airports accommodate rising infrastructure needs, increase capacity, reduce airline delays, and improve the passenger experience for our customers. The FAA’s latest National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems (NPIAS) indicates that federal infrastructure investments will also allow airports to “enhance airfield safety and support the Agency’s goal of reducing accidents, fatalities, and runway incursions.”

At a time when Congress, the FAA, airports, and other aviation stakeholders are rightfully focused on addressing near misses and runway incursions, this federal investment will provide airports with a boost in annual AIP funding that will enhance

aviation safety. Among other important upgrades and enhancements, additional AIP funding will help airports improve runways, taxiways, and lighting to reduce the chances of runway incursions.

These critical investments on the ground at airports complement other provisions in the House bill that will enhance safety in the skies. A modest increase in traditional AIP funding will also reverse a longstanding trend of flat or reduced AIP authorization levels in recent years and acknowledge the enormous infrastructure needs that airports are facing.

According to the NPIAS, airports have \$62.4 billion in capital needs—or approximately \$12.5 billion annually—over the next five years. Those estimates include projects that are eligible for funding under AIP and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. However, the overall capital need is significantly greater when you factor in other necessary infrastructure projects that aren't eligible for federal funding. The proposed AIP funding in the FAA reauthorization legislation along with the BIL resources will help airports meet some of those rising needs.

The House bill also includes multiple AIP formula changes that would update the way the FAA distributes federal funds to commercial service and GA airports. These proposed formula changes combined with higher annual funding levels would help airports of all sizes and ensure that the AIP funding formula is keeping up with evolving financial needs.

For instance, H.R. 3935 would reduce the so-called “PFC turnback” for large and medium hub airports. This proposal would allow larger commercial service airports that collect Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs) to keep a greater share of their annual AIP entitlements. The proposal comes at a time when airports have current and future PFC collections pledged to existing projects and are precluded from generating more local revenue for infrastructure projects due to the arbitrary and outdated federal cap on local PFCs.

The House bill would also help smaller commercial service airports. Under the current AIP formula, the minimum entitlement for commercial service airports with more than 10,000 annual enplanements is \$1 million. The House-passed bill would increase that amount to \$1.3 million and eliminate the financial “cliff” for airports that fall below the 10,000-enplanement threshold. Both proposals would translate into more infrastructure funds for smaller commercial service airports.

We commend you and your colleagues for including a GA title in the bill and for acknowledging the important role that the country's nearly 3,000 nonprimary airports in the NPIAS play in the aviation industry. The House-passed bill proposes to help GA airports by proposing to increase the nonprimary entitlement from 20 percent to 25 percent of available AIP funds—a significant bump.

Coupled with an increase in overall AIP funding, these two steps will help funnel more federal funds to GA airports that need additional assistance. These important airports are in communities across the country and serve many important purposes as AAAE highlighted in testimony before the committee earlier this year.

Regulatory Reform: During consideration of the last FAA bill—H.R. 302, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018—Congress expanded PFC streamlining provisions that previously had been available only to non-hub airports to small, medium, and large hubs to help reduce the time it takes airports to navigate the PFC application process. Unfortunately, the FAA decided to apply the expedited procedures to only a narrow range of projects at those airports.

Airports are pleased that H.R. 3935 would take corrective action and fulfil the intent of the previous FAA reauthorization bill by allowing airports of all sizes to “file a notice of intent to impose a PFC rather than file an application to do so.” This welcome provision would reduce unnecessary federal red tape and process requirements and dramatically speed up the time it takes airports to move forward with PFC-funded projects while lowering their overall costs.

The previous FAA bill included another important regulatory change designed to give airports more control over nonaeronautical land that they purchased without federal funds. Rather than implementing the proposal as intended to remove federal intervention where it was not warranted and give airports more control over land procured on their own without federal assistance, the FAA has added new process requirements that have slowed project approvals. H.R. 3935 includes welcome language that would revisit this issue by prohibiting the Department of Transportation (DOT) from regulating the acquisition, use, lease, transfer, or disposal of property that airports purchased without federal funds except to ensure safety and efficiency and that fair market value is received.

Airports are also pleased that the bill includes steps to reduce unnecessary red tape. For instance, the bill directs the FAA to take the lead on coordinating and scheduling the environmental review process with other federal agencies. And it increases the number of airport projects that are presumed to be covered by categorical

exclusions. Both are reasonable steps to help prevent delays in critical safety and other airport infrastructure projects.

Small Community and Workforce Development Programs: Small commercial service airports work hard to retain and attract commercial air service to ensure their communities have access to reliable air service. The House-passed bill authorizes funds for the Essential Air Service and Small Community Air Service—two long-standing programs designed to help airports in rural and less populated areas.

We're also grateful that H.R. 3935 would take important steps to expand the aviation workforce. The measure would authorize \$15 million annually for three Aviation Workforce Development Programs aimed at increasing the number of pilots, mechanics, and manufacturing workers.

FAA Contract Tower Program: I would like to thank members of this committee for being strong supporters of the FAA Contract Tower (FCT) Program—a successful public private partnership that enhances aviation safety at GA and commercial service airports around the country. Both the House-passed bill and the pending Senate FAA reauthorization bill include welcome bipartisan proposals to address controller staffing and equipment needs at contract towers.

The recent National Airspace System Review Team report highlights the air traffic controller staffing crisis and the impact it is having on our aviation system. The report mentions that “the instability of the air traffic controller workforce in the FAA is also leading to increased instability at the FAA Contract Tower Program, which results in both greater churn and higher costs in these towers.”

Both the House and Senate versions of the FAA reauthorization bill include provisions to help address the staffing challenges at contract towers. For instance, H.R. 3935 would require DOT to work with the Department of Labor to review the outdated wage determination for controllers who serve at contract towers. Controller wages have not kept up with inflation, and we believe this review would be a key step toward fixing that deficiency.

The House-passed bill also calls on the DOT Inspector General to initiate an audit of the workforce needs of the FCT Program. The Senate version of the bill would go a step further by requiring DOT to coordinate with contractors to create air traffic controller training programs that would allow contractors to train certain controllers to stringent FAA standards.

We strongly believe that these thoughtful proposals would help address staffing challenges at contract towers. They would also help enhance the pipeline of controllers who work at FAA-staffed facilities since so many younger contract tower controllers go on to work at larger airports. In other words, proposals that help improve staffing at contract towers ultimately help enhance staffing at FAA-staffed towers.

The House and Senate bills would also take important steps to upgrade equipment in contract towers to increase situational awareness for controllers and enhance aviation safety. Considering the rise in operations at contract towers and the variety of commercial, private, student, and military pilots who use contract tower airports, it is critical that their towers have the same type of technology found in FAA-staffed towers.

Environmental Initiatives: Finally, the legislation includes provisions to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and several initiatives to mitigate aircraft noise on local communities as AAEE and ACI-NA recommended. For instance, the bill would allow AIP funding to flow to environmental initiatives such as resiliency projections. It also proposes to expand the Voluntary Airport Low Emission program to all commercial service airports including those outside of non-attainment areas. And it calls on the FAA to coordinate with the Army Corps of Engineers to examine the resiliency of coastal airports.

SHORT-TERM EXTENSIONS ADVERSELY IMPACT AIRPORTS

Mr. Chairman, I commend the House for passing its version of the FAA reauthorization bill well before the initial September 30 deadline. Although Congress has had to pass one short-term extension, I am hopeful that you and your Senate colleagues will be able to pass a final five-year reauthorization bill before the current extension expires on December 31.

As you know, it took Congress three years and six short-term extensions before completing the previous FAA reauthorization bill in 2018. Congress passed 23 separate, short-term extensions over four-and-a-half years before it cleared the prior FAA reauthorization bill in 2012. Those numerous stop-gap measures, coupled with partial FAA shutdowns, were disruptive to airport operators who routinely saw their AIP grants delayed because of prolonged uncertainty in Washington. (Attached is a list of FAA extensions during the last 20 years that was provided by the Eno Center for Transportation.)

In previous years, the FAA has indicated that the agency needs one extension or multiple extensions with a duration of at least six months before the agency can begin distributing AIP entitlement grants to airports. And even with six months of authorization and appropriations in place, airports would only be eligible to receive a portion of their AIP entitlements early in the year.

Previously, the FAA gave airports three options during these scenarios: 1) take their AIP grants based on prorated calculations; 2) wait and see if Congress passes a multi-year FAA reauthorization bill or more extensions to get through the fiscal year; or 3) declare their intention to defer or carryover their AIP entitlements. None of those options are particularly good choices for airports.

With so many challenges facing airports and the entire aviation industry, we simply cannot afford to go through years of multiple short-term extensions. Repeated short-term extensions and FAA shutdowns make it exceptionally challenging for airport operators to plan and complete their capital projects. Funding uncertainty is particularly difficult on smaller airports and those with short construction seasons.

Impacts on Portland International Jetport: Funding uncertainty is a particular challenge for PWM and other northern tier airports with limited construction seasons and tight operational windows to complete their projects. But other airports around the country are also impacted by annual weather constraints including those in the west located at high elevations and those in the southeast and other areas of the country impacted by hurricanes.

In Portland, we need to start our pavement projects in early spring, typically in mid-May, and complete them by the end of September when the weather worsens. With such a tight operational window, even a small delay could force us to postpone a project until the next construction season in the following year. We are unable to start a paving project in Portland that can't be completed and ready for operation by the time our nearby paving plants close in the fall. The postponement of any paving project affects the operational efficiency of the airport, delays necessary safety enhancements, and dramatically increases our costs.

Some of the largest expenses tied to a major airfield project are startup costs related to mobilization, safety, and security measures, which can amount to 15 to 20 percent of the overall cost. For instance, contractors work to have all their equipment, safety/security fencing/barriers, materials, and support facilities on site, installed, and ready to go before the actual airport construction project begins. But if a construction project is delayed and contractors are forced to remobilize in the next construction season these startup costs are doubled.

Next year is a critical construction season for PWM since we are planning to reconstruct our taxiway A. This is the parallel taxiway for our primary runway 11/29 that moves aircraft from the runways to our terminal apron. We must start this \$13.3 million project on time because we have a tight seasonal weather schedule and a narrow operational timeline due to our extremely busy summer tourism season, which runs from June to October. With construction slated to begin early next year, we are already coordinating with our airline partners so they can adjust their May flight schedules and move equipment to accommodate the project.

PWM's taxiway project is just one project at one airport that could be impacted by funding delays. But it is not unique. There are many airports across the country with similar critical projects that can't move forward without funding certainty. At the end of the day, a series of short-term FAA extensions mean that airport capital projects that improve our national aviation system's efficiency and enhance aviation safety will be delayed or deferred.

From past experiences I know it is not cost effective, practical, or in some cases even possible to construct a project based on funding that is administered in partial year allotments. As you can imagine, airports are unable to use a portion of their AIP funding to purchase half of an Aircraft Rescue and Fire Fighting vehicle. And it's hard for airports to construct their infrastructure projects with only half of an already short construction season. That is why it critical that Congress pass a long-term FAA reauthorization as quickly as possible and remove the uncertainty surrounding AIP funding.

PRICE OF INACTION

The impacts I described above are just some of the reasons why a series of short-term extensions is bad for airports like PWM that are trying to plan and complete airfield and other infrastructure projects. But there is the price of inaction, too. I already mentioned some of the provisions in the House-passed bill that will help airports meet their infrastructure needs and improve their facilities. But those proposals will sit on the sidelines until a final FAA reauthorization bill is enacted into law.

One of the top issues facing the aviation industry today is the shortage of aviation workers. Unfortunately, proposals in the House-passed bill to help increase the pipeline of pilots, controllers, and aerospace workers will also be stuck in neutral until a final bill is cleared. The changes that lawmakers have proposed to enhance aviation safety, including those aimed at improving safety at contract tower airports, will be delayed until the FAA reauthorization bill is completed.

This year, the FAA and the aviation industry have witnessed an uncharacteristic rise of near misses and runway incursions across the National Airspace System. AAAE has joined with FAA and National Transportation Safety Board officials for discussions about the challenges the aviation industry is facing and the actions that are necessary to ensure that our system continues to operate safely.

The aviation system is in a period of intense challenge and opportunity. We have new workers and leaders, new entrants that are fundamentally changing our aviation system, and new products and technologies that can help reduce the impacts of aviation on the environment. But during this time of rapid change, we need stability and long-term certainty to carry out our traditional and future missions. Passing a multi-year FAA reauthorization bill before the current extension expires at the end of the year would help us secure that much-needed predictability.

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the subcommittee thank you again for inviting me to participate in today's hearing and thank you for the work you have done to advance a bipartisan multi-year FAA reauthorization bill. Like my colleagues at airports around the country, I look forward to working with you and your Senate counterparts to ensure that the next FAA reauthorization bill is enacted into law as soon as possible so we can meet the challenges ahead and avoid unnecessary disruptions and delays.

**FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION
AUTHORIZATION LAWS SINCE 2003**

	Congr.	Bill Number	Time Period Covered	Duration	Signed Into Law	Public Law #
The “Vision 100—Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act”						
	108th	HR 2115	12/12/2003–9/30/2007	3.8 years	12/12/2003	108–176
Short-Term Extensions of the “Vision 100—Century of Aviation Reauthorization Act”						
1	110th	HJRes 52	10/1/2007–11/16/2007	1.5 months	9/29/2007	110–92
2	110th	HR 3222	11/17/2007–12/14/2007	1 month	11/13/2007	110–116
3	110th	HJRes 69	12/15/2007–12/21/2007	1 week	12/14/2007	110–137
4	110th	HJRes 72	12/22/2007–12/26/2007	1 week	12/21/2007	110–149
5	110th	HR 2764	12/26/2007–2/29/2008	2 months	12/26/2007	110–161
6	110th	HR 5270	3/1/2008–6/30/2008	4 months	2/28/2008	110–190
7	110th	HR 6327	7/1/2008–9/30/2008	3 months	6/30/2008	110–253
8	110th	HR 6984	10/1/2008–3/31/2009	6 months	9/30/2008	110–330
9	111th	HR 1512	4/1/2009–9/30/2009	6 months	3/30/2009	111–12
10	111th	HR 3607	10/1/2009–12/31/2009	3 months	10/1/2009	111–69
11	111th	HR 4217	1/1/2010–3/31/2010	3 months	12/16/2009	111–116
12	111th	HR 4957	4/1/2010–4/30/2010	1 month	3/31/2010	111–153
13	111th	HR 5147	5/1/2010–7/3/2010	2 months	4/30/2010	111–161
14	111th	HR 5611	7/4/2010–8/1/2010	1 month	7/2/2010	111–197
15	111th	HR 5900	8/2/2010–9/30/2010	2 months	8/1/2010	111–216
16	111th	HR 6190	10/1/2010–12/31/2010	3 months	9/30/2010	111–249
17	111th	HR 6473	1/1/2011–3/31/2011	3 months	12/22/2010	111–329
18	112th	HR 1079	4/1/2011–5/31/2011	2 months	3/31/2011	112–7
19	112th	HR 1893	6/1/2011–6/30/2011	1 month	5/31/2011	112–16
20	112th	HR 2279	7/1/2011–7/22/2011	3 weeks	6/29/2011	112–21
(There was a two-week Airport and Airway Trust Fund shutdown in late July and early August 2011)						
21	112th	HR 2553	8/5/2011 / 9/16/2011	2 months	8/5/2011	112–27
22	112th	HR 2887	9/17/2011–1/31/2012	4.5 months	9/16/2011	112–30
23	112th	HR 3800	2/1/2012–2/17/2012	2 weeks	1/31/2012	112–91
The “FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012”						
	112th	HR 658	2/14/2012–9/30/2015	3.5 years	2/14/2012	112–95
Short-Term Extensions of the “FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012”						
1	114th	HR 3614	10/1/2015–3/31/2016	6 months	9/30/2015	114–55
2	114th	HR 4721	4/1/2016–7/15/2016	3.5 months	3/30/2016	114–141
3	114th	HR 636	7/16/16–9/30/2017	14.5 months	7/15/2016	114–190
4	115th	HR 3823	10/1/2017–3/31/2018	6 months	9/29/2017	115–63
5	115th	HR 1625	4/1/2018–9/30/18	6 months	3/23/2018	115–141
6	115th	HR 6897	10/1/2018–10/7/2018	1 week	9/29/2018	115–250
The “FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018”						
	115th	HR 302	10/5/2018–9/30/2023	5 years	10/5/2018	115–254
Short-Term Extensions of the “FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018”						
1	118th	HR 5860	10/1/2023–12/31/2023	3 months	9/30/2023	118–15

(Source: Eno Center for Transportation)

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Bradbury.
Mr. Peterson, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

**TESTIMONY OF GARY PETERSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
TRANSPORT WORKERS UNION OF AMERICA**

Mr. PETERSON. Thank you. Good morning, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you very much for holding this hearing today on the importance of reauthorizing the FAA administration as quickly as possible.

I am Gary Peterson, executive director of the Transport Workers Union of America. Our members include over 155,000 transportation workers across the country. We are the largest union in the U.S. aviation industry, and we represent mechanics, flight attendants, ramp workers, dispatchers, fleet service workers, pilots, simulator instructors, meteorologists, and others who safely deliver people and goods to their final destination every day.

On behalf of the entire TWU, I want to start by applauding the committee's diligent and collaborative efforts to pass H.R. 3935, the 2023 FAA reauthorization. Your legislation includes a number of historic provisions the TWU has been advocating for for over decades. Our union has strongly endorsed H.R. 3935, and we hope to see it swiftly enacted into law.

The provisions of your legislation are not only historic, but urgently needed. Every day that the FAA continues to run on a short-term extension is another day that our members face assault, unsafe work conditions, and impossible economic conditions that are incentivizing companies to offshore good aviation maintenance jobs.

Since the late 1980s, the FAA has outrageously encouraged airlines to perform their maintenance outside the United States by selectively enforcing safety regulations. Today, there are nearly 1,000 FAA certified repair stations abroad. It is at best disingenuous, and more often an outright lie, when airlines tell the FAA or the flying public that they maintain the highest maintenance standards. The truth is that no one has insight into the work performed at many of these facilities outside the U.S. There are no random inspections, no minimum qualifications for mechanics, and absolutely no expectation that the work is being done to U.S. standards.

China has been the largest beneficiary of this lack of enforcement, and now employs nearly 22,000 workers at facilities repairing and overhauling U.S. aircraft, roughly the same amount of aviation maintenance workers as the States of California and Texas combined. This is work that absolutely should be done on U.S. soil by qualified U.S. workers.

H.R. 3935 would close these loopholes and reiterate existing FAA standards. Your legislation requires companies abroad that request the rights and privileges associated with an FAA certification also meet U.S. standards. This provision will return thousands of good jobs to the U.S. and raise the level of safety in our airspace.

On this subcommittee, the TWU particularly appreciates the work of Representatives Marc Molinaro and Julia Brownley, who led this fight on the issue in this Congress.

Additionally, H.R. 3935 will save airline workers' lives. For customer-facing airline workers, violent and unruly passengers have become all too common. While the number of formerly reported

cases of unruly passengers has dropped since its peak in calendar year 2021, 2023 is on pace to record nearly 2,000 incidents of unruly behavior in our air system, a 63-percent increase over 2019. H.R. 3935 takes meaningful steps to end the threat of assault on airline workers, including updates to employer assault prevention and response plans. Although the bill could take stronger action in preventing these assaults, there is no doubt that the legislation will reduce the number and severity of assaults on ground workers and flight attendants.

The situation on airport ramps is even more dire. Early this year, the TWU mourned the tragic loss of Michal Ingraham, an American Airlines ramp worker who was crushed by a malfunctioning ramp service vehicle that pinned him to a jet bridge at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. This tragedy was the result of a failure on all levels, including that of the FAA. Ramp workers like Michal are often invisible to the public. Sadly, three other workers, ramp workers, have also died in this past year alone, including one just this last month.

It has been far too long since these rules keeping these workers safe have been reviewed and updated. H.R. 3935 mandates the FAA issue a call to action to review ramp worker safety procedures, bring stakeholders to address longstanding deficiencies in FAA policy, update training programs, and increase visibility for safety markings. For ground workers, these changes cannot come soon enough.

My written testimony details the many ways H.R. 3935 will immediately improve safety and worker rights in our airspace. I again applaud your work by directly tackling all of the major issues facing airline workers today. It is significant that your legislation earned the unanimous vote of this full committee and an overwhelming vote on the House floor. Our members are proud to support the House version of the FAA reauthorization.

Thank you again for holding this hearing, and I look forward to answering any questions.

[Mr. Peterson's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Gary Peterson, Executive Director, Transport Workers Union of America

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the House Subcommittee on Aviation, thank you very much for holding this hearing on the importance of reauthorizing the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Airline workers generate 5% of our nation's economy and ensure that our airspace remains the safest form of transportation in the world. It is critical that Congress reauthorize the FAA immediately to enable these workers to continue their essential work.

My name is Gary Peterson, and I am the Executive Director of the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU). The TWU represents more than 155,000 members across the country. We are the largest union in the U.S. airline industry and I am here today representing airline mechanics, flight attendants, ramp workers, dispatchers, fleet service workers, pilot simulator instructors, meteorologists, and others who safely enable people and packages to move around the world. I appreciate the opportunity to address this committee today and to share our concerns about several ongoing issues which threaten the safety and security of our airspace—all of which are directly addressed as part of the FAA reauthorization legislation which advanced unanimously from this committee and was overwhelmingly approved by the full House.

The TWU applauds the diligent and collaborative efforts from this committee to draft and pass H.R. 3935, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act. We worked closely with you and your staff on a full, five-year reauthorization of the FAA that acknowledges the roles our members play to make our airspace safe and allow for a well-functioning air transportation system. We, alongside dozens of other national organizations, have enthusiastically endorsed that legislation because it takes bold, intentional action to address the current problems in our air system and sets out a clear path to grow good, union jobs in the industry going forward. It is a great piece of legislation that we believe should be enacted into law immediately.

The FAA is currently running on a short-term extension that expires on New Year's Eve—just four weeks away. Every day that the FAA continues to maintain the status quo is another day that our members, the rest of the aviation workforce, and the traveling public are forced to continue to deal with a litany of problems, not because the problems are intractable but due to the Senate's inaction. We join the House in calling on the Senate to fulfill its duty in passing an FAA reauthorization bill—ideally, a bill substantially similar to H.R. 3935.

H.R. 3935 includes a number of historic provisions which the TWU has been advocating for over decades.

H.R. 3935 WILL RETURN AIRLINE MAINTENANCE JOBS TO THE U.S.

Every Congress since 1986 has introduced legislation to address the threat of offshoring aircraft maintenance. Air carriers have increasingly moved heavy maintenance work out of the country, choosing to have their aircraft maintained, repaired, and overhauled at any of the almost 1,000 FAA-certified repair stations abroad instead of at one of the nearly 4,000 such stations here at home. Alarming, the Chinese Communist Party is the principal beneficiary of the FAA's certification, employing more than 7% of the global workforce repairing, maintaining, and overhauling U.S. aircraft.

Current government practice incentivizes airlines to move this work out of the U.S. Despite issuing identical certificates with the same set of privileges to all of the repair stations it oversees globally, the FAA does not hold repair stations outside of the country to the same safety standards as those in the U.S. The result is significant cost-savings on compliance and risk when the work is done abroad, effectively directing the airlines to offshore thousands of jobs going back decades.

While the FAA nominally requires that all repair stations, regardless of location, maintain aircraft to the same standard, foreign repair stations do not have to comply with several requirements to which U.S.-based maintenance facilities are held, including:

- Mandatory security background checks for workers;
- Risk-based safety and security evaluations for facilities;
- Employee drug and alcohol testing;
- Unannounced FAA inspections; and
- FAA certification standards for maintenance technicians and support personnel

TWU members and others in the aviation workforce have seen firsthand the consequences of the lack of evenhanded regulations. Their discoveries include:

- Critical engine components held together with tape and wire;
- Parts on the aircraft exterior doors installed incorrectly, resulting in mid-flight cabin depressurization;
- Aircraft covered with flammable paint; and
- Drugs hidden behind panels in aircraft wheel wells, avionics bays, cargo compartments and lavatory walls

H.R. 3935 would close these loopholes, raising the level of safety in our airspace and returning good mechanic jobs to the U.S. Every day that goes by under the current non-enforcement regime is pushing more work out of the country. Completing work on H.R. 3935 would immediately return some of these jobs and begin a long-term process to restore U.S. leadership to aircraft maintenance. The TWU appreciates Representatives Marc Molinaro and Julia Brownley for leading the fight on the House side to return these jobs in the 118th Congress.

H.R. 3935 WILL HELP PROTECT WORKERS FROM ASSAULT

For customer-facing airline workers, violent, unruly passengers have become all too common, threatening worker safety. Videos and stories of airline workers being physically or verbally assaulted for doing their jobs have become a regular feature in the media, with many more incidents going undocumented. While the number of formally reported cases of unruly passengers has gone down since its peak in cal-

end of year 2021, when commercial air travel picked up significantly after its COVID-induced nadir, the number of cases is still well above pre-COVID levels; so far in 2023, the FAA has received 1,820 reports of unruly passengers; in 2019, the agency received 1,161 reports. This issue is not going away on its own.

In light of these troubling trends, aviation workers have proposed a number of solutions, including a no-fly list and mandatory crew self-defense training. H.R. 3935 takes meaningful steps to end the threat of assault on airline workers, including updates to employer assault prevention and response plans. Although the bill could take stronger action to prevent these assaults, we have no doubt that the provisions of this bill will reduce the number and severity of assaults in our air system. Workers will see none of the benefit of these changes, however, until these provisions are enacted into law.

H.R. 3935 WILL PREVENT RAMP WORKER DEATHS

Earlier this year, the TWU mourned the tragic loss of one of our members: Michal Ingraham, a 37-year-old man of faith who worked at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport. Michal was performing his duties safely when his service vehicle malfunctioned, slamming on the gas, jumping its brakes, and crushing Michal into a concrete column of the jet bridge. His body was pinned for several hours. Powerless to do anything, his coworkers had to continue working scheduled flights at other gates and had to see this gruesome scene. Just last month, an airport employee was struck by a fuel truck and pronounced dead at the scene. Two other ramp workers have also died recently after being ingested by jet engines. All of their deaths are tragedies that we all mourn.

Ramp workers are often invisible to the public; their work is performed under the wing and in secure areas of the airport out of view from travelers. As a result, it has been far too long since the rules keeping these workers safe have been reviewed and updated. H.R. 3935 mandates the agency to issue a Call-to-Action safety review of ramp worker safety, bringing together stakeholders with the goal of assessing deficiencies in FAA policies, training programs, and safety markings. A delay in getting this bill passed risks unnecessarily endangering the lives of ground workers across the country who rely on the adequacy of their employers' training programs.

H.R. 3935 WILL END UNSAFE DISPATCHING PRACTICES

Qualified, well-trained, and highly focused aircraft dispatchers play a key role in ensuring the safety of our air traffic system, as evidenced by their bringing every plane in the national airspace to an emergency landing in mere hours following the terrorist attacks on 9/11. Concerningly, as employers across industries began to implement work-from-home policies in response to the spread of COVID, the FAA authorized two airlines—Republic Airways and SkyWest—to allow their dispatchers to maintain operational control of flights from mobile workstations—that is, away from secure facilities in the airline's operations center. While the FAA originally allowed only 20 percent of dispatchers during any shift to dispatch remotely, months later it increased the authorization to 60 percent, all without any conditions or assurances that this change in a tried-and-true system of work would meet FAA standards. Dispatching from home raises significant safety concerns, ranging from outside distractions, lack of random and reasonable-suspicion drug and alcohol testing to data overloading home networks.

H.R. 3935 explicitly prohibits air carriers from dispatching aircraft from any location that is not a designated dispatch or flight following center, putting an end to FAA's troubling and continuing authorization of dispatching from home. Today, under the short-term extension, air carriers can—and undoubtedly will—continue to take advantage of the status quo and allow their dispatchers to maintain operational control in less secure environments.

H.R. 3935 WILL CLEAN UP CABIN AIR

The quality of cabin air circulated in flight has long been of concern for TWU members. To create breathable air 40,000 feet above sea level, aircraft pull air from the surrounding atmosphere, heat it over the engines, compress it, and circulate it into the cabin—a process known as bleed air. When the mechanical pieces of this process malfunction, contaminants can be introduced, pumping toxic air into the cabin for passengers and crewmembers to breathe. Despite this alarming reality, the FAA requires shockingly minimal training, reporting, or correcting of these incidents.

When gasified, engine oil, hydraulic fluid, fuel, and other aircraft fluids become potent nerve agents that can cause respiratory, neurological, and psychiatric symp-

toms, as well as cancer. These nerve agents can be absorbed both by inhalation and contact with skin. Repeated or prolonged exposure to these agents—such as that endured by flight attendants—can have devastating health effects. We have documented cases of TWU flight attendants who have suffered both severe and career-ending disabilities due to this chemical exposure.

Passengers, too, are at equal risk of the negative health effects from the fumes caused by bleed air. Because these fumes can smell like dirty socks or other everyday items, travelers may not recognize the health threat as it is happening. In fact, some passengers mistake the symptoms of toxic fume exposure for jet lag.

H.R. 3935 requires the FAA to create a system for inflight crew and mechanics to report fume events on board commercial aircraft while safeguarding submitting parties' information should an air carrier request details on a reported fume event. Additionally, the bill mandates a study of the occurrence of fume events and subsequent issuance of recommendations to improve cabin air quality. As a direct consequence of unnecessary delay in the long-term reauthorization of the FAA, however, inflight crew and the flying public will continue to deal with fume events and the lingering health effects.

H.R. 3935 SUPPORTS THE NEXT GENERATION OF GOOD AVIATION JOBS

The TWU believes that advanced air mobility (AAM) has the potential to create a new mode of transportation. Such an innovation, however, must be carefully reviewed and overseen by regulators in order to ensure both that it will be safe and it will benefit our economy through the creation of good jobs. Regulators must hold new entrants in the national airspace system to the same level of safety that we expect from existing stakeholders and ensure that workers are prioritized in the development and implementation of policies affecting AAM. The TWU strongly believes the maintenance and dispatching standards that govern commercial airlines should be applied to AAM operators. Additionally, regulators must contend with how AAM comports with existing labor standards at legacy transit modes—chiefly, public transportation and commuter rail lines—in communities where this new technology seeks to penetrate the market.

The TWU applauds the House for the thoughtful approach to AAM. This language stands in stark contrast to Senate proposals that would empower new entrants at the expense of safety and workers. H.R. 3935 will not be the last piece of legislation Congress considers on AAM, but it is the appropriate legislation that workers need now to prepare for the next generation of flight. We will continue to advocate for robust regulatory guardrails that guarantee the nation's continued leadership in aviation and protect jobs and hard-fought labor standards.

H.R. 3935 REESTABLISHES THE CLEAR RIGHT OF STATES AND LOCALITIES TO ESTABLISH LABOR STANDARDS

In states and localities across the country, air carriers are actively fighting to exclude their workers from labor laws. These laws governing minimum wage rates, meal and rest breaks, family and medical leave have long been understood to be state issues. Airlines have invented an anti-worker argument that has been rejected by nearly every court where it has been raised. As a result, they turned to Congress to attempt to overturn half a century of precedent. H.R. 3935 firmly rejects this effort and solidifies the right of airline workers to benefit from state and local labor laws.

Exempting airline workers from state and local labor laws would significantly dampen efforts to recruit new mechanics, dispatchers, ramp workers, and flight attendants who would not be able to rely on the benefits that are enshrined in state and local statute for workers in every other industry. In many localities, were the airlines' proposal enacted into law, airline work would instantly become sub-minimum wage work. It would instantly cause a mass exodus of workers moving to every other job in an area that guaranteed health care, sick leave, and other state-level benefits. Rejecting this proposal has not only saved the current generation of airline workers from poverty, but has also ensured that there will be a next generation of airline workers.

AIRLINE WORKERS NEED H.R. 3935 ENACTED INTO LAW NOW

We know the solutions to the well-documented problems affecting aircraft mechanics, ground workers, flight attendants, customer service agents, dispatchers, and other airline employees. In many cases, we have known these solutions for years. H.R. 3935 is a bold piece of legislation that enacts these solutions. A fully reauthorized FAA with the powers, authorities, and direction included in H.R. 3935,

will provide certainty to the industry, equip the agency with the policy tools necessary to ensure the safety and economic well-being of our air system, and prepare airline workers for the next generation of American leadership in the aviation industry.

Short-term extensions are anathema to all of these goals. While it may be politically expedient to continue to extend the FAA's existing authority, neither airline employees nor the traveling public stand to gain from the status quo. Once again, the TWU greatly appreciates the House of Representatives for its diligent work in passing an FAA bill earlier this year. We join you in calling on the Senate to finish its work and get a bill—ideally H.R. 3935—to the President's desk.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the subcommittee on these important issues. The TWU looks forward to continuing to work with the committee to advance policies that will improve workers' safety and well-being in the airline industry and beyond.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Peterson.

Mr. COHEN. I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record the following: a letter from members of the Federal Aviation Administration's Management Advisory Council in their personal capacity from November 27, 2023; a letter from Airlines for America, November 29, 2023; a letter from Aerospace Industries Association from November 29 of this year; a letter from associations representing the general aviation industry from November 30 of this year; a letter from Reliable Robotics from November 30 of this year; and a letter from the American Society of Travel Advisors, all supporting the timely passage of a long-term and comprehensive authorization.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Without objection, so ordered.
[The information follows:]

Letter of November 27, 2023, to Hon. Charles E. Schumer, Majority Leader, and Hon. Mitch McConnell, Minority Leader, U.S. Senate, and Hon. Mike Johnson, Speaker, and Hon. Hakeem S. Jeffries, Minority Leader, U.S. House of Representatives, from Private-Sector Members of FAA's Management Advisory Council, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Steve Cohen

NOVEMBER 27, 2023.

The Honorable CHUCK SCHUMER,
Majority Leader,
United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510.

The Honorable MITCH MCCONNELL,
Minority Leader,
United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510.

The Honorable MIKE JOHNSON,
Speaker,
United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

The Honorable HAKEEM JEFFRIES,
Minority Leader,
United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

DEAR SENATOR SCHUMER, SENATOR MCCONNELL, SPEAKER JOHNSON, AND REPRESENTATIVE JEFFRIES:

We are private sector members of the Federal Aviation Administration's Management Advisory Council (MAC), established by Congress to provide guidance to the FAA about critical aviation issues. Appointed by the Secretary of Transportation, our members have years of experience in virtually all aviation sectors. We are, however, writing this letter in our personal capacities.

We commend the strong, bipartisan vote in the Senate to confirm Mike Whitaker as FAA Administrator. Given our involvement with the MAC, we call to your attention the urgent need for Congress to act upon legislation to reauthorize the FAA and approve a FY2024 appropriations that fully funds the agency at the President's

requested level before the end of 2023 to give Administrator Whitaker the tools to support his and the agency's efforts.

Congress has held numerous hearings this year on the many challenges facing the FAA, and the House-passed FAA Reauthorization bill and the version pending before the Senate Commerce Committee address many of these. These include a focus on addressing critical aviation safety issues such as air traffic controller staffing, runway incursions, and cybersecurity, as well as investments in airports and improvements to the agency's regulatory and certification processes and aging air traffic infrastructure. Finally, both bills address critical efforts to advance the FAA's and industry's workforce and enhance the FAA's standing internationally as well as U.S. industry efforts to remain global leaders in aviation safety and innovation.

We were hopeful that Congress would enact reauthorization legislation well before the 2018 law expired. We were also hopeful that the repeated threat of a government shutdown would be avoided.

During the last government shutdown, FAA's air traffic controllers and aviation safety inspectors worked without pay. And while they eventually received backpay, we remain very concerned with the added stress and distraction that working without a paycheck will place on them and their families. This is compounded by the fact that current air traffic controller staffing is woefully inadequate (over 1,000 fewer than a decade ago) and they are now being asked to work 10-hour shifts, six days a week. National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy raised these fatigue concerns for controllers and other aviation workers in her recent Senate testimony before the Aviation Subcommittee.

Even though aviation users pay for the vast majority of FAA's budget, there has been unstable and unpredictable funding for over two decades due to lapsed appropriations, short-term CRs, and short-term authorizations. If ever there was a time and opportunity to reverse this troubling trend it is now.

Every FAA action we expect the agency to take to maintain and enhance our nation's aviation system requires passage of a robust authorization and a fully funded, full-year appropriations.

Congress needs to act now, and we very much appreciate your consideration of our views. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely yours,

Donna McLean.
Linda Hall Daschle.
Peter Bunce.
Will Ris.
Jeffrey N. Shane.

Linda P. Jojo.
Huntley A. Lawrence.
Rich Santa.
Brian P. Wynne.
Chris Hart.

CC: The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Susan Collins, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Brian Schatz, Chair, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development
The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development
The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Chair, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
The Honorable Ted Cruz, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
The Honorable Tammy Duckworth, Chair, Senate Subcommittee on Aviation
The Honorable Jerry Moran, Ranking Member, Senate Subcommittee on Aviation
The Honorable Kay Granger, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations
The Honorable Tom Cole, Chair, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development
The Honorable Mike Quigley, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development
The Honorable Sam Graves, Chair, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
The Honorable Rick Larsen, Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
The Honorable Garret Graves, Chair, House Subcommittee on Aviation

The Honorable Steve Cohen, Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on Aviation

Letter of November 29, 2023, to the U.S. Senate from Nicholas E. Calio, President and Chief Executive Officer, Airlines for America, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Steve Cohen

NOVEMBER 29, 2023.

United States Senate,
Washington, DC 20510-1304.

DEAR SENATOR:

As we approach the end of the calendar year and the expiration of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) authorization, Airlines for America (A4A) urges Congress work to pass a five-year FAA reauthorization as quickly as possible. We are grateful for the work that has been done thus far and are hopeful more progress can be made to ensure a long-term, bipartisan and commonsense bill.

The goals of the U.S. airline industry remain the same: the FAA reauthorization should provide long-term safety, stability and a congressional understanding of 'do no harm' by excluding policies that could adversely impact the consumers and airline employees that are so important to our industry. Reforming inefficient government processes, retiring outdated technology and demanding public sector accountability while providing for the global gold-standard of safety will help to drive domestic economic growth, promote job creation and—most importantly—improve the travel experience for the millions of Americans who fly or ship cargo every day.

The importance and need for a long-term FAA reauthorization cannot be overstated, especially at this crucial moment in time for the agency. Because of its size and the multitude of responsibilities ranging from regulator to operator, the FAA must be able to operate in a stable and predictable environment. History has shown that even minor disruptions to FAA funding and/or authorizations can have lasting impacts on the agency's ability to provide its most basic services. Without a long-term reauthorization, the agency will continue to be a safety regulator that is behind schedule on existing mandates and is struggling to maintain a legacy air traffic control (ATC) system, let alone operationalize NextGen priorities or address the acute and material air traffic controller shortage.

Our aviation system moves over 45,000 flights, 2.5 million passengers, and more than 59,000 tons of cargo every day across more than 29 million square miles of airspace. Commercial aviation in the U.S. contributes 5% to the domestic gross domestic product, accounting for \$1.25 trillion in 2022, while also supporting more than 10 million American jobs. We have the safest, most efficient and most complex system in the world. A requisite component of that vast U.S. aviation system is a well-funded FAA with long-term policy stability and accountability measures in place that will allow it to catch up, adapt and modernize.

As you prioritize Congressional action through the rest of the 118th Congress, we implore you to take action and complete a bipartisan, commonsense long-term FAA reauthorization.

Respectfully,

NICHOLAS E. CALIO,
President and Chief Executive Officer, Airlines for America.

Letter of November 29, 2023, to Hon. Charles E. Schumer, Majority Leader, and Hon. Mitch McConnell, Republican Leader, U.S. Senate, and Hon. Mike Johnson, Speaker, and Hon. Hakeem S. Jeffries, Democratic Leader, U.S. House of Representatives, from Eric Fanning, President and Chief Executive Officer, Aerospace Industries Association, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Steve Cohen

NOVEMBER 29, 2023.

The Honorable CHUCK SCHUMER,
Majority Leader,
United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510.

The Honorable MITCH MCCONNELL,
Republican Leader,
United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510.

The Honorable MIKE JOHNSON,
Speaker,
United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

The Honorable HAKEEM JEFFRIES,
Democratic Leader,
United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515.

DEAR SPEAKER JOHNSON, MAJORITY LEADER SCHUMER, REPUBLICAN LEADER MCCONNELL, AND DEMOCRATIC LEADER JEFFRIES:

The Aerospace Industries Association's nearly 330 member companies—from America's leading manufacturers of commercial aircraft, engines, avionics, and air traffic control systems to family-owned businesses comprising our supply chain—applaud the leadership of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee for their years-long work in developing bipartisan Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) reauthorization legislation that will help move the aviation industry forward. We are grateful for the House-passed Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act and hope that the Senate will soon pass its own version of this legislation before current aviation tax authorities expire on December 31, 2023. Reauthorization of the FAA is Congress' critical tool for setting civil aviation on a long-term course to success. Improved regulatory and safety processes, a stronger workforce pipeline, and restored global leadership at the FAA—all key tenets of this year's reauthorization legislation—should not be held up any longer.

The aviation industry is critical to the country's economic prosperity. In 2022 alone, our industry generated \$418 billion in economic value, representing 1.6 percent of total gross domestic product (GDP) in the U.S.¹ Throughout the history of flight, the United States has led the way in aviation safety and innovation, thanks in part due to the ingenuity of American industry, but also in part due to appropriately tailored policies and regulations provided via the FAA reauthorization bill. Today, not only are we maintaining our role as the gold standard for safety and certification, but the industry is also on the cusp of incredible technological advancements that will change the way Americans travel. Enacting FAA reauthorization this year is critical to advancing America's leadership in aerospace and unlocking this potential.

On November 15, 2023, the FAA's National Airspace Safety Review Team released a report stating that Congress' stop-and-start process of funding and authorization activity "has slowed down the implementation of key technology modernization programs" amongst other challenges.² Both the House and Senate legislation include key provisions to understand how technologies like model-based systems engineering will enhance safety in the certification process. Both bills would also ensure that the Advanced Air Mobility industry can work with the FAA to make that new sector of aviation a reality by ensuring proper oversight of the Powered-Lift Special Federal Aviation Regulation.

The aviation workforce pipeline would also be strengthened by broadening the FAA's current Workforce Development Grant Program to aviation manufacturing. This is vital as our industry seeks to attract the next generation of talent for high-paying, highly skilled jobs. To further strengthen our global leadership in aviation, FAA reauthorization legislation will improve enforcement of bilateral aviation safety agreements, ensuring we can continue to compete on the world stage. Now that the FAA has a confirmed Administrator in place, we believe it is vitally important to

¹ <https://www.aia-aerospace.org/industry-impact/>

² NAS Safety Review Team Report FINAL 20231115docx (faa.gov)

give him these new tools and authorities without further delay, to make our aviation system safer and more competitive.

These provisions represent only a snapshot of the bipartisan benefits both the House and Senate FAA reauthorization bills will bring to the traveling public, the aviation industry, and to our economy generally. I urge you to make this bill a priority so that it can be enacted by the end of this year.

Sincerely,

ERIC FANNING,

President and Chief Executive Officer, Aerospace Industries Association.

Statement of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association et al. (general aviation organizations), Submitted for the Record by Hon. Steve Cohen

CHAIR GRAVES AND RANKING MEMBER COHEN,

Our organizations collectively represent the broad spectrum of the general aviation industry including business and personal transportation, pilots and aircraft owners, aviation businesses, and state aviation officials. Our community fully supports the completion of a long-term reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) as it is important to safeguarding the operations of the National Airspace System (NAS). As we have seen in the past, short-term extensions challenge the certainty that industry and the FAA depend on to enable long-term planning and investment in many critical areas required to ensure the safety of the NAS and America's global leadership in aviation.

The general aviation industry contributes an estimated \$247 billion in economic output and supports 1.2 million jobs in the United States while supporting critical services and providing an essential lifeline to thousands of communities nationwide. Operating at our nation's network of more than 5,000 public-use airports, 13,000 private airports and airstrips, and 5,500 heliports, general aviation is an integral part of the national transportation system that connects rural areas with air travel options and forges links between businesses, their suppliers, and their customers. General aviation operations include emergency medical personnel and supplies delivery, disaster relief and recovery, search and rescue, agricultural aviation activities, recreational pursuits, personal transportation, and more. In addition, the industry supports commercial aviation by training a significantly large percentage of airline pilots.

We commend the House of Representatives and the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure and its leadership on the passage of the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act, H.R. 3935. This bipartisan legislation reauthorizes the FAA's aviation safety and infrastructure programs for five years and provides the multi-year structure, resources, and direction the FAA needs.

Additionally, H.R. 3935 recognizes the vital national role of our industry by including the first-ever general aviation title, which makes critical reforms to FAA services of specific interest to our industry segment. This bill enables the FAA to move forward on areas of significant importance to general aviation including workforce development, regulatory process improvement, airspace modernization, and the development and enabling of new technologies.

On behalf of the general aviation industry, we thank Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, and the subcommittee for holding this hearing and highlighting the importance and urgency of completing long-term FAA Reauthorization.

Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association.

Experimental Aircraft Association.

Helicopter Association International.

National Association of State Aviation Officials.

National Air Transportation Association.

National Business Aviation Association.

Statement of Robert W. Rose, Cofounder and Chief Executive Officer, Reliable Robotics Corporation, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Steve Cohen

Chairman Garret Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittee on Aviation:

Thank you for holding this hearing to discuss the importance of passing a long-term bill to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Reliable Robotics appreciates the dedication of House Aviation Subcommittee members and staff on the bipartisan passage of the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act (H.R. 3935), which provides a long-term authorization and targeted policy direction to the FAA. Our nation's leadership in aviation is not guaranteed, and advancing a FAA reauthorization bill that provides the agency with the tools, resources, and focus to safely integrate advanced technologies and operations into the National Airspace System (NAS) is crucial for United States competitiveness.

Reliable Robotics was founded in 2017 to develop and bring to market aviation safety-enhancing technologies, including auto-land, auto-taxi, and auto-takeoff, as well as high-integrity navigation and remote piloting capabilities. Our technologies enhance aviation safety by preventing controlled flight into terrain (CFIT) and loss of control in flight (LOC-I), which account for the majority of fatal aviation accidents. In addition, high-integrity navigation will provide safer access to thousands of general aviation airports in more weather conditions without costly ground-based infrastructure.

Consideration of the FAA reauthorization bill comes at a pivotal time for the United States as technologies that will significantly improve aviation safety and connect more communities with air service are within reach. Thanks to a detailed process to integrate stakeholder inputs, H.R. 3935 meets today's challenges by providing the FAA with the organizational structure, workforce and policy direction to fully integrate advanced technologies into the NAS.

In addition to providing the dedicated FAA workforce with certainty through a long-term reauthorization, H.R. 3935 includes specific provisions that will expand United States competitiveness in advanced aviation. For example, the bill includes targeted organizational changes to modernize the agency, including creating a FAA Deputy Administrator for Safety and Operations, which will improve coordination across the FAA on the certification of safety-enhancing technologies. This leadership position will be responsible for aviation safety, aircraft certification, air traffic, and other critical agency functions. Having a single reporting point for these functions will improve coordination across the FAA, especially for projects involving advanced technologies where engagement from aviation safety, air traffic, and other lines of business is necessary for safe and efficient airspace integration. The reporting structure for the new Deputy Administrator and the fact that it is a career position will also provide leadership continuity at the FAA.

Modernizing how the FAA communicates with applicants throughout the certification process will streamline operations at the agency and improve resource allocation. Through the newly established FAA Ombudsman, H.R. 3935 will address this by advancing efforts to create a portal that provides applicants and the FAA status information on certification applications and other submissions. The agency currently has multiple systems to track certification projects, but there is no single source of data on project status or which FAA offices are engaged in the review. Investing in this capability will modernize how the FAA engages with applicants while improving responsiveness to information requests. This portal and the requirement that the Ombudsman ensures an initial 10-day response to covered submissions represent significant improvements to the certification process.

As advanced technologies move from the FAA certification process into operation, addressing delays in the FAA rulemaking, guidance and technical standards approval processes are top priorities. The Assistant Administrator for Rulemaking position created under H.R. 3935 will provide the leadership level attention the FAA requires to streamline and focus these efforts on the highest priority issues to advance aviation safety. Dedicating additional leadership resources to the rulemaking process and related efforts to develop approved means of compliance for advanced technologies such as Detect and Avoid Systems are examples of how this bill is targeting airspace integration challenges.

Along with necessary organizational changes, H.R. 3935 focuses on the FAA's staffing levels by analyzing critical competencies and focusing resources on safety-focused positions in the Flight Standards Service and Aircraft Certification Service. The bill provides the FAA with the tools to improve the recruitment and upskilling of inspectors, engineers, and other positions focusing on safety-enhancing technologies and advanced automation. Additional delays in the passage of a long-term reauthorization bill will delay the implementation of these provisions and place the FAA further behind in meeting its staffing requirements.

Another important focus area in H.R. 3935 are the technologies and public policies needed to integrate safety-enhancing technologies and large UAS into the NAS. Specifically, the bill improves the two-way sharing of NAS data between the FAA and

industry which is necessary to fully integrate large UAS into controlled airspace. Along with data sharing, the bill focuses on increasing ADS-B Out equipage which has safety and airspace integration benefits. Despite the proven safety benefits of ADS-B, more than 50,000 civilian aircraft are not equipped with ADS-B Out. While these aircraft cannot operate in airspace where ADS-B is required or require specific exemptions, the lack of equipage limits safety benefits, especially at thousands of non-towered airports. Also, other vehicles, including unmanned free balloons, ultralights, and gliders, are not required to be ADS-B Out equipped. Recent events demonstrate the safety and national security benefits of expanding the ADS-B Out to these operations. We appreciate the significant focus on both of these areas in the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act and believe that the included provisions will improve aviation safety.

Improving the process that the FAA utilizes to engage with stakeholders on topics such as airspace integration and training standards for remote pilots is an opportunity for the agency to keep pace with rapidly developing technology. While the federal advisory committee process has a history of providing the FAA with this input, we appreciate that H.R. 3935 seeks to improve this. Currently, the FAA's Advanced Aviation Advisory Committee (AAAC) is charged with providing advice on an extremely broad issue set, from small UAS to advanced automation and community engagement.

Unfortunately, this broad purview has limited the AAAC's ability to engage on issues important to the advanced aviation community, including remote piloting training standards and the transition to digital flight. Through re-scoping the AAAC as the "Unmanned and Autonomous Flight Advisory Committee," H.R. 3935 will enable the FAA and industry to focus on issues that are foundational for advanced air mobility and remote piloting.

These are just a selection of provisions in the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act that will improve aviation safety and integrate advanced technologies into the NAS. Further delays in the passage of a long-term reauthorization bill slow the implementation of these critical policies, which are necessary for the United States to retain and grow its role as the world leader in aviation. In the near term, Reliable Robotics looks forward to working with members of this Subcommittee and the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science & Transportation to continue our progress towards final passage of a long-term FAA reauthorization bill.

Letter of November 29, 2023, to Hon. Sam Graves, Chairman, and Hon. Rick Larsen, Ranking Member, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, from Zane Kerby, President and Chief Executive Officer, American Society of Travel Advisors, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Steve Cohen

NOVEMBER 29, 2023.

The Honorable SAM GRAVES and the Honorable RICK LARSEN,
Chairman and Ranking Member,
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, 2165 Rayburn House Office
Building, Washington, DC 20515.

DEAR CHAIRMAN GRAVES, RANKING MEMBER LARSEN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE:

On behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the more than 160,000 travel advisors across the country we represent, I write to submit the following into the record in advance of the House Transportation and Infrastructure hearing on November 30, 2023, titled "Turbulence Ahead: Consequences of Delaying a Long-Term FAA Bill."

Established in 1931, ASTA is the world's leading professional travel trade organization. Our current membership consists of more than 8,000 companies representing more than 90,000 travel professionals, from the smallest home-based businesses to traditional brick-and-mortar storefront agencies to the largest travel management companies and online travel agencies. Together, they account for an annual payroll output of \$5.5 billion and annual revenues of \$17.7 billion.

Those numbers are only sure to increase. Despite economic pressures, people are spending more on travel than any other discretionary purchase, according to ASTA surveys. Travel advisors are experiencing an increase in demand with 22 percent of U.S. travelers having used an advisor. Over 30 percent of ASTA members report that more than half of their clients are using a travel advisor for the first time.

Which is why the current reauthorization could not have come at a better time. As Americans are traveling now more than ever, consumers are understandably confused about the myriad policies surrounding air travel. From travel advisories and various restrictions to airline fees and delays/cancellations, consumers want to travel but find it increasingly confusing. Nearly 70 percent of Americans agree that “planning a trip is more complex now.” It should come as no surprise that 54 percent of consumers agree that a travel advisor can help them better understand the issues regarding airline fees.

Travel advisors are the key to cutting through that complexity. Responsible for the sale of roughly half of air travel in the U.S., travel advisors serve an indispensable role in our country’s commercial aviation system and the broader travel and tourism industry. In 2019, travel agencies sold nearly 830,000 airline tickets *per day*, representing 48 percent of total sales and aggregate spending of more than \$97 billion.¹

As such, ASTA’s current legislative priority is reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and we applaud the Committee for its swift bipartisan passage of the legislation in June, and for now bringing to light the consequences of further delaying its progress.

The Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act (H.R. 3935) includes many of the provisions for which ASTA has been advocating on behalf of our members since the beginning of the year—and in some cases far longer. While comprehensive in scope, the bill recognizes the invaluable role travel advisors play in the larger travel and tourism ecosystem while serving as a key voice for consumers.

The following provisions would particularly benefit travel agencies, individual travel advisors and other similarly situated third-party intermediaries that make up ASTA’s membership and are regulated by the Department of Transportation (DOT):

- *Travel Agency Seat on DOT Consumer Protection Advisory Committee (Section 704)*—Adds a seat for “ticket agents and travel management companies” to the DOT’s Aviation Consumer Protection Advisory Committee, based on free-standing legislation (H.R. 3780) introduced by Rep. Dina Titus (D–NV). This provision will provide valuable insights that are missing today and help the Department meet its consumer protection mission.
- *New Consumer Advisory Committee, including Travel Agencies (Section 708)*—Creates a new “Passenger Experience Advisory Committee” at DOT, with a seat for ticket agents among its membership. The goal of the committee would be to advise the Secretary of Transportation on ways to improve the passenger experience in air transportation customer service, via biennial reports.
- *Disclosures in Offline Ticket Transactions (Section 709)*—Requires DOT to implement a streamlined system for fulfilling air consumer disclosure requirements during “offline” transactions (over-the-phone, face-to-face) within 18 months of enactment. For more on the challenges faced by travel advisors regarding the multiple disclosures they are required by law and regulation to make today and justification for Section 709, see ASTA’s February submission² to the committees of jurisdiction.
- *Travel Agency Refund Obligations (Section 710)*—Makes clear that a travel agency’s obligation to issue a client refund for a cancelled or significantly changed flight is limited to scenarios where it is in possession of the funds in question, which addresses ASTA’s concern regarding a separate, pending DOT rulemaking on airline refunds.³

We appreciate the time and effort that went into this comprehensive, bipartisan bill as well as the collaborative approach taken in terms of stakeholder feedback. We further appreciate the attention the Committee is giving the widespread implications of inaction. Should you or your staff have any questions about ASTA’s viewpoints or any issue related to the travel industry, please do not hesitate to contact ASTA’s Vice President, Advocacy, Jessica Klement. Thank you for your consideration of our views.

Yours Sincerely,

ZANE KERBY,

President and Chief Executive Officer, American Society of Travel Advisors.

¹ Airlines Reporting Corporation (ARC). Airline Sales Statistics.

² American Society of Travel Advisors. ASTA to House & Senate Authorizing Committees re: FAA Reauthorization. February 24, 2023.

³ American Society of Travel Advisors. Travel Advisors to DOT: Don’t Put Us on the Hook for Airline Cancellations [Press Release]. December 14, 2022.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. I now recognize the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Stauber, for 5 minutes.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much. I first want to recognize and thank both Chairmen Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Ranking Member Cohen for their leadership to get this bill not only through this committee, but allowing the process to go forward.

The amendments, Mr. Bunce, you mentioned watching the amendment process. That is exactly how it's supposed to work. And I want to give—I just want to say thanks to every one of you here, because your patience on this—this has been sitting on Senator Schumer's desk for 5 months. You see the damage that is happening. As an airport director, you see what we can fix. And so, it is frustrating that we have great leadership on this committee in a bipartisan fashion pushing an important reauthorization bill, and the Senate sits on it for 5 months. Look how much farther we could have been ahead. That is why we have to change the way this town delivers legislation for the American people.

We know that general aviation, commercial aviation is only going to grow in the years to come. And I want to just, before I make my comments, thank you all for your leadership, as well, pushing us to make sure that the legislation fits the demands.

And Mr. Peterson, I first want to thank you for talking about the workers, because this bill takes care of the workers above and below the wings, which are so important—they have to work together. So, I want to thank you.

In Minnesota, our local news organization, KSTP, recently reported on the shortage of airplane mechanics and technicians impacting the Minnesota aviation industry, particularly general aviation. In the House-passed FAA reauthorization bill, we tripled authorized funding for the FAA Section 625 Aviation Workforce Development Program. These aviation workforce development grants for aviation maintenance technical worker support proposals that generate and increase interest and prepare students to pursue aviation maintenance careers.

Mr. Bunce, what would this increased investment in the section 625 program mean to the general aviation industry?

Mr. BUNCE. Thank you, Representative Stauber. If you look at a facility like Cirrus that you have in the district—and Mr. Burchett also has Cirrus in his district—if you just take that, we have had competition so much for being able to get qualified workers into our factories. We all know what happened during the pandemic. We all know all industries are short. But if you look at then who we have to work with in the FAA, they have also had a great drain of resources.

So, what you have done in section 625 is be able to not only emphasize the importance of pilots—and of course, the pilot situation right now, we are building training aircraft. Both of the companies that I mentioned, both of you see that we are putting a lot of training aircraft out. And because of what we are paying pilots right now, this is starting to be solved. It won't happen overnight.

But when you look at maintenance workers and factory workers in aerospace, we have a critical shortage. One of our companies forecasts for the next 20 years almost 700,000 technicians is who we need out there. And of course, industry then competes with the

FAA for that expertise. So, we have got to build it both within the Federal agency that regulates us and within our workforce.

So, we are very appreciative of what was included there.

Mr. STAUBER. Mr. Bunce, you mentioned Cirrus Aircraft. In their new facility I toured within the last month, I asked the question, if you could hire workers today in just this facility, they said they would take 200 today. And that is all across the country. And so, I appreciate your comments.

Mr. Peterson, what other aspects of the House-passed bill do you think will increase participation in the aviation workforce?

Mr. PETERSON. Yes, so, I would say that the bill obviously funds areas for the maintenance technicians that we have been looking for for years, and this is an area that has been lacking as work has gone overseas. And unfortunately, that is where the development has gone to. So, the investment in our U.S. workforce, and getting students and educating them on why they want to enter the career field is critical.

I was young when I decided to go into this career field, realized this is what I wanted to do. But the schools that were out there when I was growing up are no longer there, similar to other trades. Reinvesting in this type of work and our younger generation to do this work is critical, and it is critical across all of the aerospace fields, whether it be manufacturing, air traffic control, maintenance technicians, pilots. All of us are—it is borne in your system and, again, it is having the accessibility which has been diminished recently, and I would say over the last 15 years.

Putting the investment back into our workers is what is critical for the future.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much, and my time is up.

I yield back.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Stauber. I recognize the gentleman from Tennessee, Ranking Member Cohen, for 5 minutes.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Bradbury, firstly I would like to say I read your resume and am impressed with what you have done to bring the Portland, Maine, airport up to snuff and in a green fashion.

Our FAA bill proposes significant increases in annual Airport Improvement Program funding. How will these funding increases benefit commercial services and general aviation airports, and in what ways do they address the infrastructure needs outlined in the FAA's National Plan of Integrated Airport Systems?

Mr. BRADBURY. It really is critical. I mean, what we have seen is the flat funding with AIP has really caused us to—\$13 billion a year is what the program has. There is \$30 billion of needs. This is a huge step in getting that infrastructure built.

For us personally, additional discretionary will come forward to help with our important safety projects. As I mentioned in my oral remarks, our taxiway Alpha is a huge and important safety program for the airport, not just Portland, but across the country. Really, airports are really thankful and appreciative of this change, after 20 years, in increased funding for AIP.

Mr. COHEN. Our bill also includes changes in the AIP formula, such as reducing the PFC turnback for large- and medium-hub air-

ports. How do these proposed formula changes contribute to fair and efficient distribution of Federal funds among airports?

And what impact might they have on the infrastructure improvements and safety measures at different sized airports?

Mr. BRADBURY. Certainly, safety is important on the ground, just as it is in the air, and it is critical that we have the needed funding. The PFC hasn't increased in years, so, making it that our medium and large hubs can use more of the AIP funds is critical.

The additional funding is really funding more projects. At the end of the day, that is the reality. It increases the amount of funding for aviation safety on the ground, and aviation safety on the ground is getting that infrastructure built and in place. Hugely critical.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, sir.

Mr. Peterson, in addressing the issue of assault on airline workers, what steps or action items has your Transport Workers Union put forth to update employer assault prevention and response plans, and what specific provisions does our bill include to mitigate the threats faced by customer-facing airline workers?

Mr. PETERSON. Yes. Again, developing a task force that involves labor and management together to look at those critical areas, the bill provides for that.

It also provides the opportunity for penalties to be announced if somebody assaults a worker and whatnot.

Post-Hearing Correction of Remarks from Gary Peterson, Executive Director, Transport Workers Union of America

Mr. PETERSON. Yes. Again, developing a task force that involves labor and management together to look at those critical areas, the bill provides for that.

It also requires the FAA to incorporate in pre-takeoff briefings a statement informing passengers that it is against Federal law to assault a crewmember.

Mr. PETERSON. And again, I think the addition of not just in the air, but on-the-ground assaults of workers at airports has recently become even more critical. These are all elements that need to be addressed, and they are addressed in the bill. But certainly, having individuals know what the penalty can and will be, and a mechanism for that is addressed in the bill.

What is not addressed in the bill is a no-fly list and some of the things that we would have liked to have seen. Maybe in the future those things will happen. Or what I think, more importantly, is the bill addresses a way to diminish what is happening, bring that temperature down, and bringing that temperature down will hopefully solve a lot of the issues that we are facing today.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, and thank you for all the members of your union who do so much to make our flying—

Mr. PETERSON [interposing]. Thank you.

Mr. COHEN [continuing]. Much more safe and convenient.

Mr. Bunce, Colonel, your statements about the impact of a delayed long-term FAA bill were quite compelling, especially the remarks made in reference to unleaded avgas. Since sustainability is a key topic within aviation currently, can you briefly explain GAMA's role in the Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions

initiative, and why the transition to unleaded fuel for piston-engine aircraft is important for the environment?

Mr. BUNCE. Sir, the EAGLE initiative, Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions, is a very important one that brings together all of the general aviation associations along with the FAA to be able to work along with the EPA, which recently released its endangerment finding, to all work on a solution together.

And I am very proud to report that just—we just had a press release earlier this week that success has been achieved with the Piston Engine Aviation Fuels Initiative with one of the companies that is going through that testing, which we do up at the FAA Tech Center, to be able to check the endurance of the fuel that they are offering, the unleaded fuel that they are offering, to be able to go and solve this problem.

There is such a strong commitment, and the support from what we have seen from this committee not only will help work getting rid of the lead out of the avgas, but then also the work that this committee is doing on sustainable aviation fuel, and trying to push that forward is absolutely critical, and we really appreciate the support so that turbine aviation, which the airlines use—and of course, our turboprop aircraft and our business jets use and our rotorcraft—is absolutely paramount to be able to achieve the goals that we, as industry, both general aviation and civil aviation, have set to be net 0 by 2050.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, and I would yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Cohen. The other gentleman from Tennessee, Mr. Burchett, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I appreciate my colleague from Tennessee, Congressman Cohen.

Yesterday, I was talking to some young students, college students, a group of Jewish folks, and I was talking to them about Israel, of course, but I invited them into my office. And one of them actually pointed out a Cirrus aircraft, a model of it that was on my desk, and that he actually flew one of those. And I thought that was pretty cool, and I appreciate you mentioning that. We are very proud of that in our district.

And I apologize, I am wearing a coat. I am a little cold. Pete Stauber, he was basically in shirt sleeves over here, burning up. Of course, he is from Minnesota, so, I guess that tells you why. And I am from Tennessee, so, I am just a little cold over here.

But, Mr. Bunce, what role does your industry play in implementing the FAA reauthorization?

Mr. BUNCE. We work very closely with the FAA. I think people realize, obviously, Mr. Santa's controllers do a phenomenal job of keeping us safe and everything, but we have routine interactions with the FAA all the time in the certification and flight standards area. So, that part of the FAA is very critical to us, and that part of the FAA is the one that has had a tremendous drain in mid-level management and also younger people.

Industry competes on wages, and a lot of people have just simply left for the private sector. And so, it is of paramount importance to us that those technicians that we work with are trained prop-

erly, are back in the office so that they can collaborate together, and those older heads that are still there can train that younger workforce to be able to work with a sector where technology is progressing so rapidly. And the only way we will be able to keep up and our regulatory authorities can be able to remain the gold standard for aviation across the planet is to be able to have that training and that working in the office together.

Mr. BURCHETT. On the same track, what do you think is the best way for Congress—for us—to work with industry on that implementation?

Mr. BUNCE. I think what you have done also with workforce development. But also, the FAA responds very strongly to questions from Congress and pressure. And really, as each one of these reauthorizations go through the process, you require some rulemaking that is done. A lot of us in industry come to you to ask for that rulemaking because things aren't happening fast enough. So, having the FAA report to you on some metrics, just an ability to see how quickly they process all of the work that has to be done, there has got to be some type of accountability, especially within the certification workforce, that they provide industry answers to things like issue papers that we often are required to put forward, and they just go back and forth within the bureaucracy, and we don't get an answer.

And any answer is better than no answer. If they say no, we try to figure out how to go ahead and give them a new approach to be able to have a positive answer. This is important.

Mr. BURCHETT. Let me ask you. Will the reauthorization—will it help support the private-sector innovation?

Mr. BUNCE. Absolutely. There is a lot of emphasis that you all put in technology here. And when we look at advanced air mobility, when we look at unmanned aircraft systems, technology will provide some answers that help provide to Mr. Santa's workforce some new technology out there, new methods to be able to go and have the situational awareness to be able to handle the increased amount of vehicles we are going to put into the airspace.

And so, being able to address the significant workforce issues that we have, coupled with providing the technology both to pilots in the air, those that control unmanned aircraft systems, and also providing Mr. Santa's workforce with new technology will help us maintain this safety that we have come to know and appreciate.

Mr. BURCHETT. Thank you.

Mr. Bradbury, can you provide us some examples of some unnecessary redtape that the FAA reauthorization should address? I know Mr. Bunce mentioned things back and forth.

Mr. BRADBURY. Certainly. There have been a couple of circumstances where Congress has set forth on land that was purchased or procured with airport funds, and being able to use that and put it into exceptional and market use, that has been a slower process than anticipated, and I think misinterpreted by the FAA Congress' intent. So, that is just one example that we have seen that we are expecting improvement on with this bill.

Mr. BURCHETT. OK. Mr. Chairman, I yield the rest of my time. Thank you, sir.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Burchett. I recognize the gentleman from Washington, the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Larsen, for 5 minutes.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chair. In hearing our discussion and hearing your testimony, I am struck by a line Stephen Colbert used on his first show, when he named a President and asked, "Great President or greatest President?" The FAA bill is a great bill, or is it the greatest bill? Frankly, it is the greatest.

[Laughter.]

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. And we need to see some movement on it in the Senate, and I think your testimony outlines that.

Mr. Santa, though, this month on the Safety Review Team, which is independent, this independent entity, published its report on assessing risks. More than half of its recommendations, 13 out of 24 recommendations, specifically focused on air traffic controller staffing and training. Can you yourself elaborate a little bit on the SRT's findings with regards to staffing and training, please, for us?

Mr. SANTA. Yes, thank you for the question. That report exemplifies precisely the problems we have had for the past 10 or 15 years.

The FAA Office of Finance and Management has a staffing model that has attrited our workforce to unsustainable levels. We want to work to new entrants. We want to service general aviation, cargo, commercial traffic, anything that comes where the professional air traffic controllers—and we love aviation, we love this industry, but with the current staffing levels, capacity is reduced. It is not sustainable to maintain the FAA Office of Finance and Management's report in the controller workforce plan.

That is why it is so essential that your bill has the new, tested, transparent, traceable, Collaborative Resource Workgroup numbers as the plan for the controller workforce plan. That will ultimately bring transparency and understanding to the health of our air traffic control facility staffing, which is abysmal right now. Six-day workweeks and ten-hour days are not sustainable. One-man sectors are not sustainable. We need more people in our facilities. With the maximum hiring for the duration of the bill, that will help us tremendously. Thank you.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Do you have some insight on what the Senate is considering?

Mr. SANTA. I don't have any insight, but working with them, we would like precisely what is written in the House bill.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Probably no disagreement up here.

Mr. Peterson, the aviation workforce, as well, continues to face some challenges, ranging from workplace conditions, concerns over workplace conditions, to whether workers are guaranteed the proper training and compensation. What are some major challenges facing your members, and can you remind us what our bill did about that?

Mr. PETERSON. I think one of the key components of the bill is all the investment in training, recurrent training and current training.

The investment in the future for maintenance technicians, training in the area of—I know we talked a little bit about the wheelchairs, right, handling wheelchairs. The ability to handle wheel-

chairs sounds simple except for how do you get it from the level of the aircraft down to the ground level. The infrastructure at the airports isn't necessarily in place. That gets addressed in the bill. The training for folks on how to move those wheelchairs gets addressed in the bill.

Again, there is some investment in training for flight attendants for self-defense and those types of things.

What I can say is my view of what is in this bill—and this body has done a great job of addressing things that we have been talking about, as the workforce, for years. And it hits on all of those. So, I mean, I could go through step by step, but you guys have hit on all marks. And that is why this bill is so critical in getting it done.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Do you have any insights on what the Senate bill, Senate discussion is?

Mr. PETERSON. I do not.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Does anyone have any insight on what the Senate is doing?

Sorry. That is good enough for me. I appreciate it, and I will yield back.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Mr. Larsen. I recognize the gentleman from South Dakota, Dusty Johnson.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member. I love, love, love the topic of this hearing, because I do think it is worth reminding every—this town loves to languish, right? We make progress, and then it seems like inertia grinds us to a halt.

But this committee got an impressive bipartisan work product done on time. And again, I want to thank the chairman and the ranking member for that. It was a pretty impressive package, as has been alluded to a number of times. It had major provisions that accomplished the major priorities that our leadership talked about. I do want to highlight quickly a few of the things that I fought for.

First off, encouraging the FAA to develop a digital, cloud-based, interactive platform to speed environmental review so we can get more of these infrastructure projects done in a timely manner; an increase to the General Aviation Non-Primary Entitlement Program; greater flexibility on the Airport Improvement Program funding; and then commonsense reforms to the Essential Air Service. We, of course, needed some reforms. We also wanted to make sure that, while we were enacting those reforms, we protected rural airports in places like Watertown, Aberdeen, and Pierre in South Dakota.

This committee has done its work, and I think it is time for us to continue to amp up the pressure so that Washington can stop with the languishing of this long-term aviation reauthorization.

A few questions for our panelists.

First off, Mr. Santa, talk to us a little bit about the value of the Contract Tower Program to our National Airspace System.

And then give us some sense, if we don't get a long-term reauthorization, if there are any threats to airports.

Mr. SANTA. Well, there are hundreds of communities serviced by the Federal contract program. They are generally smaller airports

that serve mostly general aviation, and they are valuable. We have controllers and facilities and fields that generally wouldn't get that level of service due to that program. That program is always up for debate when reauthorization lapses, and I think it would be a difficult pill to swallow, losing those facilities temporarily due to a lapse of reauthorization.

Other than that, I know that in this bill, there is an evaluation of some of the facilities.

As I said before, 10-year staffing models: It's a lifetime in this industry. It changes every single day. So, evaluating those to recapture some of the highest capacity facilities does make a lot of sense, and it is included in the bill.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. And then for Mr. Bradbury, you heard me talk about Essential Air Service. I think it is an incredibly important provision to make sure that our country is connected in the same way that interstate highways go through rural areas as well. Talk to us about the impact to those most rural airports if we don't have a long-term reauthorization soon.

Mr. BRADBURY. Certainly. I can speak right from Maine. Maine is a large, rural State, and Essential Air Service plays an important part in connecting a large, rural State to the national air transportation system. Not only the national air transportation system, but the worldwide air transportation system. Critical. We have Essential Air Service at Presque Isle. We have Essential Air Service in Augusta, Maine. And Portland, Maine, is a small hub, but it is critical. Those are just two examples for what becomes part of the national air transportation system.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. So, if we don't have Essential Air Service, or if there isn't the predictability of a 5-year reauthorization, does that put any particular stress or uncertainty onto these rural communities?

Mr. BRADBURY. I believe it does. I certainly believe it does. And by talking with those other airport managers in the State, it is a concern, no question. I mean, we need reauthorization to keep these programs going.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. I also talked about speeding environmental review. Give us some sense of how that might benefit airports. I know a lot of them have a number of infrastructure projects they would like to get done over the course of the next few years.

Mr. BRADBURY. Certainly. I mean, every project, it is a long process to get through some of the environmental review, and sometimes it is even—when you miss certain deadlines in that process, it can set a whole project back. We ultimately get there, but every time we can speed that up and have the same result, it is huge. It is really just about efficiency and keeping costs lower, part of that efficiency.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. I mean, do you have a quick horror story? What is the longest that you have heard of a project going, from bid letting to completion, and maybe slowdowns because of environmental review?

Mr. BRADBURY. Yes, I do have a horror story. It was an incident take plan, but it was with investigations in skat from a rabbit that held up a project indefinitely until we could get that all worked out

with the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. We were at the northern extreme boundary of a certain type of rabbit.

Mr. JOHNSON OF SOUTH DAKOTA. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you. The gentleman from Georgia, the other Mr. Johnson, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. And thank you to the witnesses for your testimony today.

In today's political climate, it is not often that Americans see colleagues on both sides of the aisle on any particular committee come together in a unified way to get anything done. But that is exactly what happened when this committee voted 63 to 0 back in July to pass the FAA reauthorization bill out of committee, a bill that required a four corners agreement to ensure that both sides came to the table for the benefit of our constituents, but most importantly, for the American people as a whole.

A few of my priorities as we crafted this legislation were combating aircraft noise, strengthening aviation safety, diversifying the workforce, and enhancing the air travel experience for both passengers and workers, all of which I can say this bill does a good job of addressing.

I was extremely proud to see the Willa Brown Aviation Education Program to support outreach and educational opportunities in underrepresented communities included. This program would be instrumental in strengthening and diversifying the U.S. aviation workforce, with the overarching goal being to address the shortage of workers in the aviation industry.

Mr. Santa, adequate staffing levels not only enhance the ability to manage increasingly complex airspace, but also mitigate the risk of fatigue-related errors, ultimately safeguarding the well-being of passengers and the integrity of global air transportation systems. Your testimony states that, "... understaffing forces the FAA to assign mandatory overtime to controllers on a regular basis."

What are the safety risks that this kind of work schedule creates for the National Airspace System?

Mr. SANTA. Thank you for the question. It is all exacerbated by the lack of staffing.

When you are working 6-day workweeks and making thousands of decisions an hour on position, and none of them can be wrong—the margin of error is not 0.0001, you have to be 100 percent accurate, because the safety of the passengers and the industry rely upon you—and working 6-day workweeks, 10-hour days, 200 hours a month, it is a strain, it is a stress. It is fatiguing. And to eliminate or to combat that, we need maximum hiring, and we need the controller workforce plan to have the basis of the CRWG numbers, precisely what your bill does.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Is it possible that controller fatigue may have played a role in any of the near-miss incidents over the past year?

Mr. SANTA. Those instances are still under investigation, and we have party status with the NTSB, so, I can't comment on those.

But fatigue is a factor in the capacity of the system, for sure. The delays—

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Are——

Mr. SANTA [interposing]. Go ahead.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Air traffic controllers are only humans, right?

Mr. SANTA. That is correct.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Yes. Your testimony also talks about the lasting impacts of extreme budget cuts such as the across-the-board cuts from sequestration a decade ago. Can you elaborate on what impacts these Republican-induced budget squeezes, Government shutdowns, and even the threat of lapsed funding, what that has had on controller hiring and the safety of our airspace system?

Mr. SANTA. Absolutely. I think Mr. Bunce put it clearly. We need new technology, we need enhancements. And unfortunately, with the FAA budget request, we are in sustainment and fix-on-fail only.

A few stats are ASDE-X, which is an essential tool for runway surface separation. It will not be expanded to any new facilities. TFDM, which is an enhancement, was initially slated for 89 facilities. It is down to 32 sites because of funding issues. We have delayed enhancements to our legacy system, our radar systems, that will impact the future to be able to handle the increased traffic, systemwide.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Mr. Bunce, do you want to add a final comment to that?

Mr. BUNCE. It's not only some of the very expensive technology that Mr. Santa just pointed out that just can't be funded, but also what you have done in this bill is encourage the ability for us to put the technology into lower cost solutions that actually provide great situational awareness.

Right now, when—and both Rich and I are pilots, we all carry these in the cockpit [indicating notebook]. Well, there is technology out there right now where the controllers can send us a taxi path electronically. And young people that are new to flying and aviation, they are used to following a magenta line, just like they do in their automobiles. Well, we can transmit that magenta line to them. This thing talks to you to say if you stray from it, and it gives you warnings. We could put this out today, and it would enhance our surface awareness capability with other very low-cost solutions. And if we focus on that, we can provide the technology both on the ground and in the air that really helps in the safety regime.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you.

I thank the chair for his indulgence, and with that, I yield back.

Mr. YAKYM [presiding]. The Chair now recognizes Mr. Owens for 5 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you, Mr. Chair and Ranking Member Cohen, and our distinguished guests and witnesses for taking the time to shine a light on the devastating consequences of failing to pass a long-term FAA reauthorization. While there is no shortage of crises in this body to address, few are more pressing than keeping airlines flying, passengers safe, flightcrews on time, and air traffic control towers functional.

Air travel is becoming increasingly painful for both passenger and crew alike. The fallout from no FAA reauthorization only perpetuates the diminishing trust Americans place in aviation infrastructure. We are in a position to help restore confidence in air

travel, and I think I speak for this room: We all want to be a part of that solution. Congress owes it to the nearly 3 million American passengers who travel every day to get this bill over the finish line.

Mr. Bunce, in your testimony you observed the industry is going through an era of development and innovation in technology that rivals the dawn of the jet age. Can you elaborate how this FAA reauthorization differs from those in the past, and why this time the stakes are higher?

Mr. BUNCE. At this point in time, with technology moving as rapidly as it is, we have to have the FAA keep up. And as I mentioned earlier, we have to have the training available for them to be able to understand the new technology. The experts are out in industry. Our regulators need to be familiar with that technology to be able to properly regulate and do the safeguards that we all have seen over the last several years is a great emphasis to this Congress and the American people.

And so, as we look at this rapid innovation in technology, we have got to be smart on what electric technology does because we are all looking—we were just talking about Essential Air Service. We are going to be able to provide, with advanced air mobility vehicles, not only the ones that fly vertically, what we call eVTOL, but some of the conventional takeoff and landing aircraft, an ability to be able to help with rural America and be able to provide that transportation to our hubs.

And we also can use the—our Nation has an incredible network of airports that no other Nation has, over 5,000 public use airports. Some of them have towers, some of them do not. But by allowing the technology to move forward such as having remote towers and a capability to be able to network all of our facilities together, really provides us an ability to expand and allow these new entrants to come into the airspace safely.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you.

Mr. Bradbury, my brandnew hometown airport in Salt Lake City is currently in phase 2 of a three-part, \$5 billion redevelopment. Can you explain the impact of a delayed FAA reauthorization to Salt Lake City International Airport and other airports undergoing modernization efforts?

Mr. BRADBURY. Sure. I mean, the great thing of this bill is, it's not just airside safety. It also will allow terminal enhancements and gives us some flexibility in funding those terminal improvements which will enhance the passenger experience and the accessibility to our airports.

So, we really appreciate some of this thinking on the process in this bill and the AIP program.

Mr. OWENS. OK. And Mr. Santa, what benefits—now again, I just want to kind of reemphasize some comments you made earlier. I think everybody needs to hear this again. What benefits could the National Airspace System realize if FAA addressed the air traffic control shortage? Could this improve operational tempos at airports or increase the amount of traffic that can be handled in the Northeast?

Mr. SANTA. Yes, capacity is immediately increased due to more than one person working a sector. More eyes at the sector allows higher capacity, better safety margins, better pilot reports, and tur-

bulence reports. It is a system that relies on more bodies to run higher intensity traffic in the Northeast Corridor or in Florida or in Las Vegas.

We are stressed so far now by single-sector operations that the limiting factor—you are missing your connections, you are missing your vacation destinations because capacity is reduced. So, capacity is the biggest benefit of adequate staffing.

Mr. OWENS. I also want to thank you guys here. I happen, again, to live in Salt Lake City, in probably one of the most innovative States in the union, and we are growing like crazy. And it is based on how we handle our infrastructure, not only Salt Lake City International Airport, but also Provo and beyond.

So, we really need to get this done with, because cities like ours need to make sure we can plan out in the future, and that is based on how well you guys can plan out and put things in place. So, thank you so much for what you are doing.

I yield back.

Mr. YAKYM. The Chair now recognizes the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Brownley.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I hope this strategy works by having this hearing today that will spur the Senate to act with haste.

Mr. Peterson, thank you for mentioning Mr. Molinaro and my bill in your testimony. And I really do appreciate your work to ensure that aircraft are being maintained safely, regardless of where in the world they happen to be repaired. Can you share some examples of concerning maintenance work your members have found on aircraft repaired outside of the United States?

Mr. PETERSON. Sure, aircraft engine components held together with tape, wire, which is completely out of compliance. We found that as they have come back to the U.S. Aircraft painted with flammable and toxic paints. Damage repaired through a painting process, not doing the actual repair, but just painting over the top of it. Doors installed upside down and backwards.

We have also experienced along the way—and this isn't just germane to the overhaul of the aircraft, but we have experienced guns, drugs behind panels, hidden behind panels, whether it be in the wheel well, avionics bays, or even in the lavatories. It is a common thread that we find as these aircraft go into these heavy maintenance facilities.

Accessibility—as a passenger, you see the outside of the aircraft, the cabin and whatnot. As a maintenance technician, we see behind those panels. Most of those panels don't get opened unless there is something wrong. So, it is very easy to do things and put things in places that don't get accessed for many months or even years at a time. And this is a concern that we have, obviously, with foreign facilities and access to aircraft. This is one of the reasons why the FAA and their ability to oversee and look at these facilities like they do U.S. facilities.

I will give you a prime example: China. I don't know that an inspector has been in China in years. They were doing inspections by video. If they want to come on our property in the U.S., they walk in and they can ask me any question they want. In China, they need 6 months' notice to go visit a facility. That's insane. And the

standards are so different that—we are held to this standard, they are held to that standard. We need to be held to the same standard, and I am proud of the standards we have here.

And that's why I'm passionate about the bill, I'm passionate about the work that you guys have put forward. Those are just some prime examples.

Ms. BROWNLEY. So, are the airlines returning work to the United States after they are aware of these instances?

Mr. PETERSON. No, they just move it around, to be fair. We do a lot of rework. We get airplanes back that are not in flying condition, and we wind up redoing a lot of the work in the U.S. to put it back in a flying state. Not the full check, but pieces of that check.

So, again, the standards aren't the same. Who is doing the aircraft maintenance, working on the aircraft, it is absolutely not the same. And unfortunately, we wind up doing a lot of repairs on other people's work. We have been blessed not to have an accident, and I hope that never happens, but eyes on these aircraft need to change.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Well, having a blessing is not really the right policy. But is the FAA taking any action under its existing authority to enforce some of these safety rules?

Mr. PETERSON. Well, the FAA has had—I will just use the drug and alcohol piece of this. The FAA, that legislation, was passed in 2012, I believe, and it's sad it hasn't been acted upon. I am proud that that's addressed in this bill, and it will move forward. The Office of Management and Budget has moved that forward now.

That's a prime example of—we have drug and alcohol testing for our folks. They don't have drug and alcohol testing. If it's not necessary, then why are we doing it? And let me say this, it's absolutely necessary. It is fundamental to what we do. We all understand that.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you, sir, very, very much.

I don't have much time left, but Mr. Bradbury, I wanted to ask you. I have done some work around sustainable aviation fuel. From your perspective, what can Congress do in this upcoming FAA reauthorization, to really help airports develop SAF fueling infrastructure to increase the supply and provide cleaner fuel?

Mr. BRADBURY. The FAST grants are a good start, and we appreciate that this reauthorization will keep that kind of work moving.

We have submitted for one in the Northeast region through Boston to really look at the logistics and the delivery of SAF to the Northeast, so, looking forward to it. It is important, and it is the way to really help on the carbon footprint of the aviation system.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. YAKYM. I thank the gentlewoman. I now recognize myself for 5 minutes. I would like to thank our chair, as well as our ranking member, for their work on this FAA reauthorization, and I am hopeful that we will get this across the finish line soon.

It was 142 days ago that this committee unanimously passed its FAA reauthorization bill after a robust, open, transparent, and bipartisan markup. It was 133 days ago that the House passed this bill 351 to 69, after, again, a robust, open, transparent, bipartisan

floor process. It's good to finally see some green shoots from our Senate colleagues, and I hope this means that we can get back to work on a final bill very soon.

But as we eagerly await that, I commend the chairman for convening this hearing to highlight some of the important things that an FAA reauthorization means for all users of our national airspace. It is things like ensuring our gold standard of aviation safety, strengthening the general aviation community, increasing funding and flexibility for airport infrastructure, addressing the pilot shortage, and facilitating the future of aviation with firm timelines for the FAA to finally issue a beyond visual line-of-sight rulemaking for unmanned aircraft systems, as well as final interim regulations for advanced air mobility systems. There are these and so many more provisions that will help propel our aviation industry forward in the next 5 years.

Mr. Bunce, your testimony mentions the importance of facilitating more timely, transparent, and accountable promulgation of rulemaking, policy, guidance, and related materials. Can you explain why the rulemaking process is so critical to getting aviation innovation to the marketplace, and how H.R. 3935 addresses these challenges?

Mr. BUNCE. Sir, our industry is very unique. We really can't do anything without a rule. So, if you have a very laborious rulemaking process that takes years and years, what happens is it doesn't keep pace with technology, but it also allows for other authorities outside the U.S. to be able to lead in aviation rulemaking. So, let me give you a few examples.

I mean, we were looking at the cybersecurity rule. Pretty darn important to be able to address cyber in this day and age. It has been languishing.

We look at what is called SMS, Safety Management System, rule. We have a critical rule in front of us right now that impacts advanced air mobility, which we refer to as the SFAR, and it is a Special Federal Aviation Regulation process. And if we don't get this right, we will not lead the world in advanced air mobility.

You mentioned BVLOS, beyond visual line-of-sight operations. We are primed to do that, and I am very happy to report that the differences between the traditional manned aviation community that operates down in low altitude a lot to a lot of our airfields, our helicopter fleets and that, now that these companies are being able to equip with what we call detect and avoid technology, a lot of that impasse now has melted away. And it is time for the FAA to start moving to get BVLOS across the goal line.

But if it takes years and years, one of the other problems is, we don't let other authorities, when we go into what we call ex parte, to participate in collaborative rulemaking. That's just crazy. When you have a rule that takes 3 years long, to not allow them, when comments come in and they adjudicate those comments, to then go and coordinate with somebody like EASA, the European Aviation Safety Agency, is crazy.

Mr. YAKYM. Thank you. As a part of this FAA reauthorization, I was proud to have a bipartisan amendment that I co-led with my colleague from Nevada, Ms. Titus, included in this bill. It was a simple amendment that requires the FAA to set its air traffic con-

troller hiring target at the maximum number that can be trained at the FAA Academy through all 5 years of the reauthorization.

Mr. Santa, you have talked about the challenges facing the air traffic controller workforce, but can you talk a little bit more about the importance of this specific provision in the context of the overall bill?

Mr. SANTA. Well, personally, I want to thank you for that amendment. It will pay huge dividends for the air traffic controllers, having maximum hire for 5 years.

As you heard, even maximum hiring for 5 years results in understaffed facilities. If we don't pass this bill, and the FAA Academy closes, and the hiring is suspended, we will be set back even farther. But maximum hiring for the duration of the bill will start, along with the Collaborative Resource Workgroup being the basis for the controller workforce plan, will start the healing of our facilities and the increasing of the staffing in 313 facilities across the NAS.

Mr. YAKYM. Thank you, Mr. Santa.

I yield back, and the Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Arizona, Mr. Stanton.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. Thank you to each of the witnesses for being here today.

The committee has worked hard to craft a strong, proactive, and bipartisan 5-year Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill and send it to the House floor, where it passed overwhelmingly. We did our job. But in the 4 months since, the Senate hasn't even held a committee vote on this critical bill. And because they couldn't meet their original deadline, the FAA is operating under a short-term extension that expires on New Year's Eve, 4 short weeks away.

We need to keep our skies safe and our planes moving, in part so people can see their friends and family, but also because aviation is a key part of our national and international economy. Arizona's aviation economy supports nearly 19,000 jobs and contributes billions to the State and the country.

Look, we have the safest and most efficient aviation system in the world. This Thanksgiving was one of the busiest travel days ever, and the women and men who staff our airports, airlines, and air traffic control towers deserve credit for keeping things running smoothly, as all airport workers did, as well.

But one of the issues I hear about most often is aviation workforce shortages, particularly air traffic controllers. And overworked, understaffed air traffic control towers are one of the contributing factors leading to the rise in harrowing near-misses at airports nationwide. Over the last year, there have been several near-misses at Sky Harbor in Phoenix, one of the busiest airports in the world.

At Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport, one of the fastest growing commercial airports in the country, we just opened a brandnew \$30 million air traffic control tower. But staffing shortages have forced the airport to reduce operations at the tower by 4 hours per day.

The House's FAA reauthorization, the one the Senate has yet to take action on, increases FAA hiring targets for air traffic controllers, sets up workforce development programs to improve recruit-

ment and retention, and sets up a pilot program to convert towers staffed by private companies, like at Phoenix-Mesa Gateway, to be staffed by FAA controllers.

It is not just airplane safety. Our bill also addresses passenger safety, as well, particularly the safety of passengers with disabilities. Just last week, a video went viral showing ground personnel carelessly throwing a passenger's wheelchair down a ramp, where it bumped off and bounced across the tarmac, and we have a video.

[Video shown.]

Mr. STANTON. People depend upon these devices to move around, to get to their jobs, to visit family and friends. These mobility devices are not inexpensive. They can range up to tens of thousands of dollars. And there needs to be oversight on this carelessness, and I stand ready to work with my colleagues here and with the Department of Transportation to ensure everyone feels safe and able to travel.

Our House-passed FAA bill takes meaningful, commonsense steps, many that I was proud to lead on, to improve the flying experience for passengers with disabilities. My ADAPT Act, WHEEL-Chairs on Airplanes Act, and the Mobility Aids on Board Improve Lives and Empower All (MOBILE) Act, were included in the House-passed bill so that passengers with mobility issues can have proper accommodations from boarding to seating, and everything in between.

I think I speak for all of us here when I say that we will keep working to get this bill across the finish line. Our economy and the safety of the flying public depends on that, and we need our colleagues in the Senate to be better partners.

Mr. Santa, I want to build on my colleagues' comments and questions on how to better our air traffic controller workforce to keep our skies safe. The Safety Review Team report, an independent panel commissioned by the FAA to look at near-misses, specifically talks about how the plan to replenish the workforce is dated and, frankly, unrealistic.

Specifically, when accounting for retirements and other attrition, the current plan reduces "a negligible improvement over today's understaffed levels," to the tune of less than 200 additional controllers on the job by 2032.

I have two questions: first, how can we attract more people to be air traffic controllers; and second, if we can't, what does this mean for the chances of more near-misses, or even the possibility of collisions, at airports?

Thank you. And then after the question, I will yield back to the chair.

Mr. SANTA. Attracting people to the profession hasn't been historically difficult. On a bid, we will get upwards of 10,000 applicants. The problem is the hiring process. The FAA Office of Finance and Management does not feel that we are understaffed. That's just frank. The controller workforce plan that they have presented to you this year actually reduces our numbers.

This is in a small workforce. We have 1,000 less certified professional controllers than we had a decade ago. We only have 10,700 controllers. Removing 10 to 12 percent of that, it's not sustainable.

So, getting people to apply generally isn't the problem. Moving it from the failed FAA Office of Finance and Management model to what is in your bill is a major solution.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you.

I yield back. Thank you.

Mr. YAKYM. The Chair now recognizes the gentleman from Georgia, Mr. Collins.

Mr. COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think there has been one common theme that I have heard over and over and over, and that is modernizing and modernization. And it is true. And it is not just in aviation, but it is in the entire Federal Government. And I don't think it can be said enough, Mr. Chairman, and we need to say it over and over and over again that, yes, this committee unanimously passed a great bill, and it passed the House overwhelmingly.

But, you all, I don't know what is going on in the Senate. I mean, they must have one whale of a pickleball tournament going on over there, because they certainly aren't getting anything done. I mean, they have got bills stacking up everywhere. And if I seem frustrated, yes, I am a little frustrated because I actually had an amendment in the FAA reauthorization, too, that studies hypersonics and getting it incorporated into the national airspace. And this amendment addresses a number of things we can't say enough: workforce provisions, airport improvements, policies to help our general aviation community.

So, Mr. Bunce, the Senate's delay in passing this reauthorization bill, what FAA modernization provisions are most pressing and need to get done now? And I know you have said it, but I think it just needs to be said over and over again.

Mr. BUNCE. To be able to keep pace with technology, the FAA has to have nimbleness in its rulemaking. By bringing an Associate Administrator for rulemaking that this bill does, elevates the importance of being able to get rules, policy, and guidance out. We think that's very important, and I think the Senate has similar provisions that are able to support that.

Likewise, what the House bill has done is also create a Deputy Administrator for safety and operations. I think that is extremely critical, because when we have a change in administration or we have FAA Administrators that finish their term, we need that continuity and stability to be in place, to be able to go and keep all of the metrics that are required by all of the different parts of the FAA to be able to hum along and not have to reinvent the wheel every time we have a new Administrator and Deputy Administrator.

And then the emphasis that we have on technology there and the training of the workforce is so vitally important. We have got to be able to have a workforce that is able to understand the technology and to be able to certify it. And that certification delays and everything puts us behind.

If we are talking about hypersonics, which we all support, that is a holy grail to be able to get there. We have got to be able to do also supersonics. But the rigor that is required and the expertise that is not resident in the FAA right now would make certifying

that type of technology extremely difficult, and this bill helps address that.

Mr. COLLINS. I appreciate it.

Mr. Bradbury, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport, the world's busiest airport, right now they have got a multibillion-dollar modernization project going on that is going to help improve efficiency and customer service. How is delaying this reauthorization of the FAA going to affect those projects?

Mr. BRADBURY. I'm sorry, I missed the last part of that.

Mr. COLLINS. How is the delay going to affect those projects?

Mr. BRADBURY. Oh, it is critical. And again, it is both operational and, for us, seasonal. So, there are very tight construction schedules around the summer season for us that we have to get the work done. And if we don't have a reauthorization bill, and it's continuing resolutions, there is no guarantee that we will have the funding in place to get these really important projects underway and moving forward.

Mr. COLLINS. I agree with you 100 percent. I have been to the airport, been to the tower.

Mr. Santa, I just want to finish up with a comment. I have been to TRACON in South Atlanta, met with the air traffic controllers. Great people. A lot of them are veterans, very proud of what they do.

But I am going to tell you something. There are two things. NOTAM, yes, it failed. It is 30-year-old software. And instead of our FAA concentrating on improving that software, what did they do? They spent tens of thousands of dollars to write a 179-page ruling to change it from Notice to Airmen, to Notice to Air Missions, and it certainly didn't make it any safer, because it failed.

And the other thing I would like to say is the fact that we have an FAA that is more focused on hiring people based on DEI and wokeness instead of qualifications is one of the main reasons that you are seeing a lot of your air traffic controllers retire or quit, because they don't want to be responsible when someone comes in and something drastic happens because we have an FAA that is being led by a Secretary of Transportation, Pete Buttigieg, who is totally unqualified, has no idea what he is doing, and is pushing nothing but a socialistic experiment on an industry that he doesn't know anything about.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA [presiding]. Thank you, Mr. Collins. I recognize the gentlelady from Kansas, Ms. Davids, for 5 minutes.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Thank you, Chairman Garret Graves and Ranking Member Cohen, for holding this hearing today. And thank you also to Chairman Sam Graves and Ranking Member Larsen for their leadership on passing a commonsense reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration in the House.

Like many across the country, my holiday travel last year was impacted by some of the widespread flight delays and cancellations that we saw. And while our country's skies are absolutely the safest in the world due to the hard work of our pilots and air traffic controllers, flight attendants, ground crews, and more, we have seen a troubling uptick in the near collisions at airports in our

country, and these kinds of disruptions have become far too frequent, costing travelers both time and money.

And this year, House Republicans and Democrats came together without theatrics to pass a bipartisan piece of legislation to reauthorize the FAA. The bill contains provisions that are going to have a huge impact on our flying experience as well as the economy, not just in my district, but across the country.

And as a member of this committee, I have been working hard to ensure that the voices of the constituents in my district in Kansas are heard during this process. And while I was glad that the measures to protect Kansans' financial security and safety and to boost domestic manufacturers made it into the final bill, the reauthorization that we passed here hasn't been taken up by the Senate, which we have heard from multiple of my colleagues.

The reauthorization we passed included consumer protections that require airlines to reimburse passengers for unexpected meal and hotel costs, and to establish policies allowing passengers to sit next to their young children. It also contains improved safety standards for air travel to help decrease airport near collisions, to review airplane emergency medical kits, evacuation procedures, and improve cabin air quality.

And also, we saw the reauthorization in a bipartisan way uplift our local aviation workforce, boost domestic manufacturing, which is especially important in my State of Kansas, where we have a really strong legacy of aviation.

And finally, this bill is going to improve and promote hiring of more air traffic controllers and strengthen the talent pipeline for pilots, maintenance technicians, and aviation manufacturing workers. And all of this is good stuff.

There are, of course, pieces of the legislation that I disagree with. I am sure there are pieces of the legislation that my colleagues disagree with. But the nature of coming together in a bipartisan way requires that we figure out how to get that done. And we all understand the benefits of a strong system to ensure that our economy continues to move forward.

Passage of the FAA bill is exactly how our Federal Government should be operating. We saw that here in this committee, people from both parties coming together to find solutions to some of the most pressing issues that we are facing as a country. Pragmatism, compromise: these are things that make this work possible, and we have gotten to see that here. I really hope that the Senate will consider the version of the FAA reauthorization that we have put forward, and I will look forward to working on a final compromise with what they do end up getting done.

Mr. Bunce, I do want to chat with you for a moment about the FAA reauthorization that we passed and the provisions that focus on strengthening the safety workforce, improving the agency's rule-making, which I have heard from you about today, even. And I would love to hear a bit more about the provisions in the House version of the bill that you see as improving the industry's safety and competitiveness in this increasingly competitive global market that we are in.

Mr. BUNCE. Thank you, Ms. Davids. First of all, thank you for your emphasis on advanced air mobility. Things like mobile clear-

ances, that's going to be able to facilitate the ability to get these vehicles into the airspace.

But again, as I mentioned earlier, the rulemaking itself, policy and guidance needs to be more nimble and streamlined because we are losing our edge in the world environment when other authorities can be able to promulgate rulemaking much faster. And we all know we have to comply with the Administrative Procedure Act, but we have got to be able to audit our processes, be able to look at it and look at what other Federal agencies do to be able to have more nimble rulemaking to get through the process. Sometimes it is taking 5, 6 years, and the advanced rulemaking just sits on the shelf while other countries take what was done and are able to apply it.

So, that and the emphasis on technology and on workforce, all of the things that have been mentioned in this hearing so far, are so critical to maintain our safety and to be able to improve as we put more vehicles into the airspace.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Thank you. And thank you to all of our witnesses for being here today and emphasizing the importance of this work.

I yield back.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, Ms. Davids. I recognize the gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Van Drew, for 5 minutes.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you, Chair. I am in strong support of passing a comprehensive and long-term FAA reauthorization. In the House bill, we have secured a number of big wins for the United States of America.

I am most proud to say that our bill makes the William J. Hughes Technical Center permanently located in southern New Jersey, and more specifically, dedicated to advanced aerospace. The newly named FAA Technical Center for Advanced Aerospace will provide steady jobs, and most importantly, an opportunity for technical advancement aimed at bettering the safety and the capabilities of air travel. It's important.

Also important is the amendment that will improve the protections for people with disabilities in our travel industry. The air travel experience should be a pleasant and safe one for everyone, for all people, so, ensuring quality access is of utmost importance.

American aviation today faces numerous problems, ranging from air traffic controller shortages, safety issues with documented near-misses of aircraft, a rising number of cancellations, and our inability to keep up with advancing technology. Staffing shortages are plaguing aviation. This not only has detrimental impacts on our economy and the labor workforce, but also the safety capabilities of our aviation industry. This is serious stuff.

Specifically relating to the staffing shortages, Mr. Santa—and I have to digress for a minute. I love your name, man. Santa. It's perfect for this time of year. You're just too skinny.

Mr. SANTA. Thank you.

Dr. VAN DREW. Do you ever have fun with it?

Mr. SANTA. Never, ever.

Dr. VAN DREW. Never?

[Laughter.]

Dr. VAN DREW. Well, see—OK. I am, right now. If I were you, I would. But anyhow, I've got to get on. These questions are for you.

What are the safety implications of the staffing shortages, and what can be done to ensure that safety isn't further affected?

Mr. SANTA. As I have said numerous times before, safety is our priority. No matter what the staffing at the facility levels are, no matter how critically staffed we are, and no matter what plan the FAA Office of Finance and Management puts out to reduce our numbers, safety is our priority. We are proud of it. We are professionals. We are dedicated to our skills. And it takes a lifetime to learn how to become a good controller. You are continually getting better.

So, with that priority focus, the capacity is reduced, obviously. With single-sector positions, and with the increase in traffic by new users—general aviation is up, cargo is obviously up—the deficiency comes in. You just can't work that much traffic with the understaffed situations in our facilities. But safety is always a priority.

Dr. VAN DREW. And we can't say it too many times. What role has the FAA Office of Finance and Management played in the current controller staffing model? What is their role?

Mr. SANTA. The biggest detriment is the staffing model that the FAA Office of Finance and Management employs. They report to industry and to Congress a much healthier situation than is actually out there. Last year, they reported our facilities at 102 percent staffed by using erroneous and flawed information. Our facilities are not 102 percent staffed. They are critically staffed. We are thousands below even an old, 10-year-old number.

And the new CRWG numbers that desperately need to be implemented, they have been jointly collaborated. The FAA's ATO and NATCA collaborated on these numbers. The experts in the facilities collaborated and determined these numbers as what is needed to service the industry, service the traffic, and the FAA has refused to implement those. And that is why this bill is so important.

Dr. VAN DREW. I appreciate your answers. And the bill is important, man. We've got to get moving—not us. But we have heard that theme over and over and over today about the Senate. I hope they watch this hearing. If Congress doesn't pass a long-term funding solution to the FAA, America is at risk of losing its competitive edge in our tech race against China, which is real.

Mr. Bunce, the aviation system continues to evolve daily, and important innovations are being made in the industry, from drones to advanced air mobility. The American aviation industry is moving fast, yet the Government remains stuck in time. What are the ramifications for the advanced air mobility industry, specifically—specifically—if this FAA reauthorization legislation is not enacted in a timely manner?

Mr. BUNCE. Sir, if we look at the opportunity that advanced air mobility gives us—and again, a lot of emphasis is on the vertical takeoff and landing aircraft, but it is also the electrification. If you think about a spinning turbine and the amount of electricity you can generate off of it, you can augment thrust.

And I read with great interest, COMAC, which is a Government-supported program in China, just put forward a 19-passenger air-

craft using that type of technology, the electric augmented thrust. And so, this bill gives direction to the FAA to be able to work with industry collaboratively on advancing these technologies. The tech center plays an incredible role.

In fact, I hope that we, after this bill is complete, we can get together industry and the Government and be able to have also NASA bring in their long-term program to be able to—how they are supporting industry in advanced air mobility and merge those programs more collaboratively, because there is a lot of great work that the tech center could do in conjunction with what NASA can do to help further this and keep our global leadership in place.

We are an aerospace nation. We need to stay that way.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you. And I want to thank Chairman Sam Graves, Ranking Member Cohen, Chairman Garret Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen, and this entire committee, and all of you. You have done good work on it.

I yield back.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you. Mr. Van Drew, Mr. Cohen, I hear you all continuing to make reference to Mr. Santa and fun of his name during the holiday season, everything else. I am really not sure what you all were taught as kids. The last name is “Claus.” I just want to, for the record, make that clear.

With that important clarification, Mr. García, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Chairman Graves and the ranking member, for this hearing.

The House passed the FAA bill, which contains, of course, priorities that I was proud to advocate for, including a long-overdue increase in AIP and workforce development funding and improved consumer protection measures. As my colleagues have stated, it is critical for the safety of the aviation industry and the American public to expeditiously pass a bipartisan FAA bill, but we cannot do so at the expense of our airport workers.

Airport workers, many of them who are women, Latino, and Black, work grueling hours for poverty pay to keep our airports running. And they deserve better. That is why I introduced the Good Jobs for Good Airports Act, which would provide livable wages and benefits for these workers. Although not included in the House-passed bill, it is important to keep fighting for strong labor protections during future negotiations. This includes guarding against provisions that could unravel hard-won labor agreements like a pilot retirement age increase.

Mr. Peterson, can you talk about how bolstering airport worker wages and labor protections can benefit airports writ large?

Mr. PETERSON. Sure. So, first, let me say that we support your legislation on the workers' wages.

One of the things that we do see is a heavy turnover in the groups that you spoke about. They start working in the job, and then they leave the job because other things become available. They are often lower paid than a lot of their peers in other industry, it is costly to get to the airport, and things of that nature.

So, again, having legislation that provides workers with good pay and good benefits is critical. Obviously, our belief would be that if all of them joined the union, we would fight for that. But with leg-

isolation like yours, getting that in place for sustainability is critical. And that is a baseline, obviously. Some high-cost areas are already doing that. They have to do that because they just can't get anybody to come work there. So, we absolutely appreciate that.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Well, thank you for your answer. In your written testimony you mentioned that airlines are pressing Congress to preempt State and local labor laws that govern minimum wage, meal, and rest breaks, and family and sick leave, which builds on their local efforts to exclude airline workers from these laws. Why would excluding airline workers from the State and local labor laws be disastrous for the current and future generations of airline workers?

And how does the House-passed bill reaffirm the right of States and localities to set higher labor standards?

Mr. PETERSON. Yes, again, I think it goes back to, if everybody that lives somewhere has a certain set of rules or laws that apply to them, to exclude airline workers to me seems preposterous because of the industry we work in. Granted that some people—and let me say this, the airlines that have been fighting this for a while have not been successful in their litigation on that.

Somebody that is a flight attendant, for example, saying, well, you live here, but the law doesn't apply to you because you are flying to another State—that is their job. Or are a pilot. Again, that is the issue at hand, is: Why would I stay in this industry?

And taking a step back, let's just use a flight attendant. The flight attendant field has become somewhat controversial. I talk to a lot of flight attendants today that say, "I wouldn't want my son or daughter to become a flight attendant" because of what they have seen happening in the industry recently. So, taking away laws that everybody else has, if you are hearing that from the current flight attendants—and we don't represent pilots, but I am sure there is a similar philosophy there—that if you are hearing that from flight attendants today, how do you get people to come into the industry if they can go work somewhere else and get the benefits of State laws that are in place?

And so, that is why this is critical.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you very much.

And, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you, I appreciate it, Mr. García. I am going to recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Bunce, in your testimony you made reference to certification challenges in regard to technology. I met with a manufacturer this week that made similar references to some of the delays and inability to get important technology certified. You similarly made reference to the fact that the FAA is not actually in-house working, and our bill does attempt to address that. Have your members reported many experiences about delays or lack of capacity that is impacting the ability to implement or update technology that could bring greater efficiency, safety, and other improvements to the aviation sector?

Mr. BUNCE. Mr. Chairman, I hear about it every single day, and it is the one issue that frustrates and confounds my membership on a daily basis. If we don't have an efficient certification process, and we have delay after delay, you are trying to develop new prod-

uct, and what happens is a lot of times—I had one of our major aviation companies say, “Pete, I know I’ve got technology out there right now that will not allow an aircraft to crash unless the engines are totally disabled,” and yet he doesn’t even move it forward because he said, “I know I can’t get it through the certification process in the amount of time that I can recoup the investment on engineering.” So, it is truly debilitating our workforce and our ability to advance technology when we can’t get through the certification process.

Let me give you another example. We validated a product coming from Europe on an aircraft, and the exact same—and it was a nacelle issue, the area that surrounds an engine. The same manufacturer provides the engine and nacelle for a U.S. product, but we did delay after delay and an unbelievable amount of testing when we already validated the product coming in from Europe.

So, not only do we have a problem with an inability to make decisions, but also, we don’t look at decisions that we have already made and say, OK, our foreign authorities certified that, now we’ve got the same manufacturer here, why are we going through a process that takes well over a year to look at the exact same thing?

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Yes, thank you. And Colonel Bunce, if you have specific recommendations on particular parts of the certification, like policy office or others that you think would benefit from in-person work, I would love to get that from you in writing.

Mr. Santa, you discussed in your testimony at length the need to address the lack of capacity with air traffic controllers. Our bill does step in and attempt to address that, to force the FAA to hire more controllers and to address the projected shortfalls in the FAA workforce, and requires assessment looking at future training, as well.

The FAA, as I noted in my opening statement, recently received a pretty jarring report from the SRT, the Safety Review Team, and there was a response to the recommendations stating that the agency is expanding the use of advanced training and beginning to deploy simulators for the use in controller curriculum that increase capacity and leverage benefits, putting controllers in specific facility environments sooner. What are your thoughts on the use of simulators to improve training or adding capacity?

Mr. SANTA. Anything that creates efficiencies is welcomed, but we cannot degrade standards or qualifications or certifications. It is a professional job that takes a lot of skill, and there is no substitute for working the traffic. That can never be explained away or technology can replace that.

But really, it is indicative of the bigger problem, masking the problem, not identifying that we have a staffing shortage, and trying to explain it away by different options and different ideas instead of adopting the CRWG numbers like this bill does, and doing maximum hiring for the duration of this bill. Just a few days ago, they have agreed that maybe we can do maximum hiring for 3 years. It doesn’t work. They are unwilling to move off of the FAA Office of Finance and Management model, which has failed us.

Mr. GRAVES OF LOUISIANA. Thank you. I know a number of Members here have some tight timelines. I have got some more ques-

tions, but I am going to submit them for the record for the other members of the panel.

I do want to thank you all for being here. And with that, I go to my friend from Nevada, Ms. Titus, for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

I represent Las Vegas, and the airspace over my district is very busy and getting more crowded. You have got all of the commercial airlines coming into McCarran. This was our busiest month. In October, almost 5½ million. You have got all the private jets coming for the big events like F1 and the Super Bowl. They are using Henderson and North Las Vegas. You have got helicopters taking tours to the Grand Canyon. You have got Nellis Air Force Base, and you have got casinos using drones to deliver drinks by the pool. So, it's everything.

Now, I want to speak to you, Mr. Santa. It is distressing to say you have 1,000 fewer than you had 10 years ago, and you will only have 200 more 10 years from now. But we are getting more people in the skies. Can you just say one more time for the record how important it is to keep up with that demand in air traffic controllers?

Mr. SANTA. Well, first of all, I want to personally thank you for your amendment. It will serve air traffic controllers well by maximum hiring.

But Las Vegas is one of the hottest spots in the country. Their numbers being 10 years old, their staffing numbers, they have requested—they have put joint recommendations together. Their numbers are way too low.

Ms. TITUS. Yes.

Mr. SANTA. The new CRWG numbers address that. The FAA is unwilling to completely adopt them and put them into the controller workforce plan. It is creating challenges specifically at Las Vegas, among other facilities across the NAS. Ten years is a lifetime in this industry, and specifically for Vegas, as you have said, with the F1 race—

Ms. TITUS [interrupting]. Or international flights, too.

Mr. SANTA. All the international flights, they did have some of the busiest traffic and they are servicing that airport the best they can with critically understaffed needs—measures.

Ms. TITUS. What are your members doing to be—I hate the term—but “proactive” and encouraging ways to improve the situation, either airport improvements or all—instead of just reacting to an incident?

Mr. SANTA. We have a lot of programs: ATSAP, which is a voluntary reporting to report issues before they become chronic. VSRP does similar—a similar goal. And we are part of the solution. We are collaborative. NATCA members are tasked, and they should be collaborative with all of the solutions at the facility. The major situation specifically in Vegas and many of our facilities across the country is critical staffing. We have tried to be collaborative, and we are.

The FAA's ATO, the Air Traffic Organization, and NATCA jointly developed new staffing numbers that were degraded by 10 years, and they will not be implemented by the FAA at this point.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you.

I am going to ask any of you this. I know the airline industry is—well, aviation generally—is moving to more sustainable flights, and we need the infrastructure to support that. I saw where Virgin Atlantic just flew from London to JFK on totally green fuel. Can you talk about how that will not be able to move forward if we don't get this bill passed, Mr. Bunce or Mr.—anybody?

Mr. BUNCE. Well, I think the support that the bill gives to be able to keep the momentum going on sustainable aviation fuel or on the piston side of the house to eliminate avgas is very important.

But also, if you look at the infrastructure improvements that we can make to airports, we have got a pilot program that you call for in the bill to be able to go and look at the electrification, because we are going to have to be able to charge a lot of these new vehicles, but also the ground vehicle infrastructure that we have at each one of our airports. So, that is really forward thinking. And it is very critical in aviation. We don't care on the auto side of that house, our trucks, about how really heavy batteries are. But it is all about weight for aviation.

The incredible rotorcraft community that you have there at Las Vegas that allows Americans to go over our precious resource, the national parks and that, we want to be able to move that forward. We can electrify the tail boom and reduce all the mechanical linkages of tail rotor and that by using the energy of the spinning turbine motors that are driving the main rotor shaft. Those types of things are facilitated by looking at technology, and we are very appreciative of what's in the bill to help that.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. Well, thank you.

And Mr. Chairman, I would also point out how bipartisan this was. I worked with Mr. Van Drew, Mr. Yakym—oh, well, he is gone—but anyway, Mr. Graves, on a number of these provisions, and I really hope to see them be enacted because I think they are improvements to the system.

Thank you very much, and I yield back.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER [presiding]. Thank you, Ms. Titus. And with that, I would like to recognize my colleague from Florida, Mr. Bean.

Mr. BEAN OF FLORIDA. A very good morning to you, Madam Chair. Good morning, Aviation Subcommittee. It is great to see you. You guys at the witness table have done an outstanding job. You have sold us. We are in.

I have been here 11 months. Let me tell you what I have learned. I have learned that this committee is the most bipartisan committee, and there is agreement that we can do so much better. We are doing great now, but we can do so much better if we made changes. What if we had a bill that made changes and improved manufacturing and labor and the air traffic control and airports? We do, we just passed one. So, what I have discovered, we are the choir. We are the choir you are preaching on. Preach on, witnesses, and preach on, committee members. So, I am all in, if anybody is keeping track. I think everybody has said we are all in. We need it because it is just an opportunity to make things better.

My thought is, I know that they have very big desks in the Senate. Chuck Schumer has got a big desk because I know somewhere

on his desk is this FAA bill. Is it possible he just doesn't know it's there? Is that possible, that he just doesn't know? Is it possible he's just so busy? Does he realize how important air travel is? Maybe he takes the train, I don't know. We've got a big crowd here today, we've got big committees. Maybe somebody here who knows him personally can poke him or give him a note to say, hey, have you looked on your desk? Because there is a bill that will definitely improve air travel and make it safe.

I have also discovered this. I have flown. I have never flown as much as I have in the 11 months that I have been in Congress. And I now know, having toured the FAA Air Route Traffic Control Center in Jacksonville, which has a—I know we have talked about how big Nevada is, but Florida and the corridor and the Space Coast and the weather presents its own challenges. Everybody, when you are on a plane now, just know that there is somebody watching over you. There is an air traffic controller watching over you, and we just take it for granted that they are well rested and they are not overworked. And so, I am grateful for them.

We are just grateful that the airport is going to receive us, and they are not going to be overworked or have the space or the concrete is going to be just right, and all the standards, and workers, and so many things. So, if we don't pass this bill, or if we extend it, we are missing an opportunity. We are missing an opportunity to go forward.

My question to Mr. Santa is the contract program is a great program. This is the Contract Tower Program. We have got 262 small airports across the country participating in it. I have got several in my district, Cecil and Craig Airports. If we don't pass it, if we just punt and not score the touchdown with it, how does that affect—what is our plan? What say you, Mr. Santa?

Mr. SANTA. Thank you for the question. Thank you for the support for JAX, as well. That facility is in a critically staffed nature, as well. It is critical to the east coast traffic, and they are doing a phenomenal job with no resources. So, thank you for that.

FAA Contract Tower Program services our smallest facilities, right? General aviation, busy facilities, flight schools. Mr. Bunce and I both are pilots, and we use those airports. My home airport is actually under the Federal Contract Tower Program. And with the reauthorization lapse, those programs are suspended, so, the service and the safety that you would expect into those airports is lessened.

Mr. BEAN OF FLORIDA. Ten-four, ten-four. I am almost out of time, but everybody here, if you are sitting out in the audience, you are part of the T&I Aviation Subcommittee family. So, together, maybe we can get the word to people with the big desks that have so much going on to say let's take the one out that says FAA reauth, and let's put that on the hot burner.

Mr. Chairman, with my last little bit of time I want to ask for unanimous consent on a part of Mr. Santa's written testimony.

In your written testimony, which I have read, you have a section that says how important air traffic control is to this bill. That provision was inserted.

And with your permission, Madam Chair, and unanimous consent, I would like for that section of Mr. Santa's testimony to be now known as the Santa clause.

I yield back.

[Laughter.]

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Well, without objection, so ordered, Mr. Bean.

With that, my friend from California, Mr. Carbajal. Follow that.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. As long as it is Santa clause, but not DeSantis-something, that might work.

Mr. Bunce, I appreciate your testimony highlighting the importance of technology and innovation. One of the provisions that I worked on with Representative Yakym and Davids was a pilot program to deliver clearances via mobile devices. This is intended to help modernize our technology and air traffic control towers and deliver more efficient digital clearances to aircraft through internet protocol for general aviation and on-demand part 135 air operators.

Mr. Bunce, can you expand upon how this would work from a user perspective, and, Mr. Santa, from an air traffic perspective?

Mr. BUNCE. Yes, Mr. Carbajal. If you look at what you provided in those provisions, we have worked very closely with Mr. Santa's organization. It is a very collaborative way to be able to take the technology that we have today, just the cell phone technology.

When either of us fly and we file a flight plan, we get—immediately on our cell phone—the routing that you are expected to get. But then we have to go on the radio, and we have to confirm that. And when you use the radio, you introduce a probability of error that you are going to copy something wrong in that. The technology exists today to be able to get that clearance, and to have it and acknowledge it back to Mr. Santa's controllers, and it's done. And it will make it safer.

But also, think about now the advanced air mobility vehicles entering into the space. If they are in a very dense metropolitan area, right now, they are going to have to get on the radio or the cell phone—and probably the cell phone, because radio line-of-sight may not be working—to be able to get to the controlling agency to be able to say, "I need clearance for takeoff." With this technology, we will be able to do that electronically, and it will make the system work. Otherwise, it is going to bog down with just calls.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Mr. Santa?

Mr. SANTA. I just want to add we heard a lot about bipartisanship, and this industry works on collaboration. Mr. Bunce and I—whether it is a CEO of an airline, whether it is general aviation, cargo, whatever, we work on our issues. And all the technology, unfortunately, the FAA generally can't provide due to funding, we still work on it. We still embrace the technology that is available and the challenges that we face to try to serve the industry the best we can. And it is something that we are all proud of.

And when we sit up here, we don't pre-plan this message or this status. It is in us because we do it and we live it every day.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. Continuing with you, Mr. Santa, one of the FAA's most successful Government-industry partnerships is the Contract Tower Program; 262 smaller airports across the coun-

try participate in this critically important air traffic safety program, including 21 in California, one of which, the SLO County Airport, is in my district. Can you comment on the importance of the Contract Tower Program to the national air transportation system?

And what impact will there be on the program if FAA reauthorization is significantly further delayed into next year?

Mr. SANTA. Thank you. I have said many times before it services some of our smaller airports, and that is a little erroneous. Some of our Federal Contract Tower Programs and airports serve hundreds of thousands of airports a year. And that is essential to the safety, the efficiency, and the capacity of those airports, no matter where they are at.

With the reauth lapse, those programs get stalled, they get on hold, and there is a real opportunity for them to be canceled. Losing service to those airports and those regions and those communities, it would damage the economy and this industry.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMÉR. Thank you, Mr. Carbajal. With that, I will recognize Mr. Molinaro from New York for 5 minutes.

Mr. MOLINARO. Thank you, Madam Chair. I am often concerned in following Mr. Bean, so, I am glad to have a little bit of distance. I never know how he is going to ultimately land the plane. Today was no different.

But thank you all for your participation. I also want to share a degree of frustration. I certainly know the Senate majority leader. I know he flies on a plane. I know he likes airports. I know he likes planes. I know he likes the industry. The fact that we have this hearing at all is entirely unnecessary, were the Senate just simply to move forward earnestly with the consideration of FAA reauthorization. And the failure to do so, quite frankly, does threaten a number of sectors within the industry. I want to start with one.

The House reauthorization bill includes a provision, a bill that I worked on with the committee, that would help to accelerate the emergence of advanced air mobility. Mr. Bunce, you talked a bit about this already, but I would like to return to it because I see, in particular, electric vertical takeoff and vertical takeoff technology as having great benefit not only to those more congested airports, but also rural airports in places like upstate New York, where there are geographic and topographical challenges. I have an airport in the gorge of upstate New York, for instance, and being able to connect those smaller airports with regional airports will accelerate access to flight and greater transportation capacity.

The provision specifically includes a new pilot program to grant funding to airports for expanded access to the electric aircraft charging equipment, which is necessary to make those important upgrades to allow for vertical takeoff. Mr. Bunce, if you could, could you just expand on what delays in at least reauthorization with this provision mean to the, in particular, eVTOL and VTOL technology, and the impact to airports specifically?

Mr. BUNCE. Well, sir, at this point in time, it is very critical for us to move out on advanced air mobility, and a delay in getting this reauthorization done is only going to exacerbate what has been

created by the movement to what we call a powered-lift rating for new pilots in advance, especially these vertical takeoff and landing aircraft.

So, not only will—the FAA Administrator, as I said earlier, has now a mandate from the overwhelming bipartisan support he had on his confirmation, and now he is got to be able to focus on areas like having the NextGen office, which is really the technology innovator, those that are starting to think about how we are going to provide the charging for multiple different types of aircraft made by different manufacturers to be able to charge the vehicles, and then have, coming from all of our different airports, the ability to get into the airspace.

Remember, if we are able to do this properly, we can have small vertiports around that then transport, as you said, to maybe a reliever airport on the outside of a big city. That reduces then the regional transportation that is required at the hubs, because we can put the regional aircraft at these smaller reliever aircraft and increase our capacity at the hubs.

So, the first step is allowing these airports to have a charging capability for electric aviation and electric vehicles.

Mr. MOLINARO. And I appreciate that. And as I said, the capacity to expand access in upstate New York and rural airports is very important.

Mr. Bradbury, do you want to add to that? And if you don't mind, I want to get one last question in, so, briefly, if you could.

Mr. BRADBURY. Sure. I just want to say airports really appreciate the pilot program that you have established in this bill. It really will assist airports in eVTOL and advanced air mobility. It is very much appreciated.

Mr. MOLINARO. And I appreciate working with all of you.

I also appreciate working with the folks at TWU. And Mr. Peterson, I am grateful that you are here. You are doing fine, by the way. I understand this might be your first time testifying before a congressional committee. Is that true?

Mr. PETERSON. That is correct.

Mr. MOLINARO. You are doing a great job.

But I wanted to point to a piece of legislation that we crafted together, the Global Aircraft Maintenance Safety Improvement Act. As you know, America outsources, too often, repair. You have testified that China is the largest destination for offshore aircraft maintenance jobs. Could you just speak to the kind of maintenance work that is being performed on U.S. aircraft at facilities in China, and how this bill addresses that very dangerous status quo?

Mr. PETERSON. Sure. So, I think the first part of that is the main work being done in China is the heavy maintenance and overhaul, which is the behind-the-scenes, behind-the-panels opening up the aircraft, what the passenger and the flying public doesn't see. That piece of work, I would argue, is critical to the U.S. aviation industry.

And to me, as a mechanic, knowing that the people that—our folks, when they work behind that, I know they are FAA certified, I know there are inspectors on the facility and whatnot. In China, I don't know who is working that aircraft. I don't know how they

worked on the aircraft. And ultimately, when it lands back in the U.S. and I then take it over, I now become responsible for it.

Mr. MOLINARO. And I appreciate that. The fact that we don't have this global safety standard would surprise most passengers in this country. It is a pleasure to work with TWU and all of you on this.

Mr. PETERSON. Thank you.

Mr. MOLINARO. I yield back.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMÉR. Thank you, Mr. Molinaro. I will recognize Ms. Norton from the District for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. I thank the chair and ranking member for holding this hearing to emphasize the importance of passing a long-term Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization bill soon.

As the cochair of the Quiet Skies Caucus and the Member who represents the District of Columbia, which is plagued by aviation noise, I would like to use this opportunity to highlight two provisions I got included in the House-passed FAA reauthorization bill, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act, to combat helicopter noise. Helicopter noise can harm health, quality of life, and the structural integrity of homes.

In 2019, I led a request to the Government Accountability Office to conduct a study on helicopter noise in the national capital region. In 2021, GAO released its study and recommended that the FAA implement a noise-sharing mechanism for helicopter operators in the national capital region. In 2022, the FAA initiated a pilot program with a private company to create a helicopter noise-sharing mechanism in the national capital region. After the end of the pilot program, Fairfax and Arlington Counties contracted with the private company to maintain the mechanism, but solely for northern Virginia. The FAA fell well short of what GAO recommended.

One provision in the bill would require the FAA within 180 days to create and implement a helicopter noise-sharing mechanism for all helicopter operations in the national capital region, and to make the data collected accessible to the public online. This data would help us develop additional solutions to combat helicopter noise.

The other provision in the bill would direct GAO to conduct a study on reducing the helicopter noise in DC, almost all of which is created by Government helicopters. The study would consider the extent to which military operators should continue operating over unpopulated areas outside of DC for training missions, the extent to which vehicles or aircraft other than helicopters could be used for emergency and law enforcement response, and the extent to which helicopter operators have assessed and addressed the noise impact of various factors of operating helicopters, including altitude, the number of flights, flightpaths, prime time of day of flights, type of aircraft, operating procedures, and pilot training.

I would like to close by highlighting a provision I worked on to improve emergency medical equipment, including the contents of emergency medical kits and training required for flightcrew. Flightcrews should have the medication and training to address medical emergencies, including anaphylaxis, opioid overdose, and unique needs of children.

I yield back my time, Madam Chairman.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you, Ms. Norton. With that, I will recognize my colleague from New York, Mr. D'Esposito, for 5 minutes.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for being here.

I want to start off with you, Mr. Santa. From reading your biography, I understand that you began your career at the New York TRACON facility in 1997. I want to thank you for your service there. And obviously, you are well aware of the issues that they are facing.

TRACON N90, right in the center of my district, is probably one of the key facilities that directs planes and aircraft in and out of the New York metropolitan area. And obviously, despite the importance of this facility and the necessity of it, it is currently only half-staffed. And I actually have had the opportunity over the last few months to make a visit there and put the boots on the ground and talk to individuals who spend their days and nights in that facility. A very impressive facility, to say the least.

Because it is only half-staffed, the FAA has extended cuts to minimum flight requirements and air traffic capacity at New York City area airports through October of 2024. So, I just have a few questions for you in regards to TRACON N90. The first is, can you describe in more detail how this substantial staffing shortfall has affected flight operations in New York?

Mr. SANTA. Absolutely. New York TRACON is critically staffed. And it is exceptionally important to the Northeast Corridor running Kennedy, Newark, LaGuardia operations, amongst other—White Plains, Teterboro, and all of the facilities up there that service corporate traffic, as well.

The short staffing has taken a toll on overtime. Obviously, the 6-day workweeks and 10-hour days become the norm. It becomes difficult to continue normal operations of training, normal operations of enhancements, modernizing just airspace routing. And learning the complexity of that airspace becomes a challenge because you are always on. The expectation of those facilities and those airports is to keep capacity as high as you can, obviously, with no safety lapses.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Right. So, speaking of the safety lapses, obviously, with a short staff, there is tendency—I know that there are rules in place, but when I was there visiting and speaking to the leadership, the labor leadership, obviously, people that work there, they feel overworked. They are probably fatigued. For those who haven't visited one of these facilities, it is dark. Even in the middle of the day, you would think it is the middle of the night.

Have there been any notable incidents that you would attribute to the staffing shortage at the N90 facility?

Mr. SANTA. Their professionalism up there and everywhere is unparalleled. They work, as many of our facilities do, long hours, extra overtime, and a lot of time on position. That facility specifically, if we want to talk about Newark, they have done an exemplary job of basically eliminating delays, eliminating delays due to staffing and costs due to staffing, just by tenacity and a lot of hard work and dedication to their trade.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Yes, they are phenomenal, and I was happy to be able to work with some of my colleagues during the preparation for the FAA reauthorization. There was a proposal to send some of the N90 workers to, I believe, Pennsylvania. And luckily, we were able to keep those jobs right in the district and right on Long Island.

You also—or someone—mentioned that the staffing gap would probably take 5 years to close. As a temporary fix, what steps do you suggest that the FAA can take to enable flights at New York City airports to be at full capacity once again?

Mr. SANTA. Well, unfortunately, the FAA was lapsed in the law to do local hiring. For years, they didn't employ that law. And just recently, they put a bid out and I think they got over 300 qualified candidates. Hire those candidates into New York TRACON and New York Center. Both of those facilities desperately need them. They can start training. They can return back to some normalcy on their shifts because they are aggressively getting the job done there, whether it be training, servicing the industry, or maintaining the highest safety standards that they need to.

Mr. D'ESPOSITO. Well, thank you very much. And I know that we have talked about all morning that the expiration at the end of the year would be devastating. Obviously, the CR for transportation expires in January.

And I think it is a common theme, one that was mentioned by both my colleague from New York, Mr. Molinaro, and Mr. Bean from Florida. The facts are simple. We have a good piece of bipartisan legislation. And unfortunately, it is following the same route as much other good legislation like our Secure the Border Act that has been sent over to the Senate and is apparently collecting dust. So, I wish we didn't have to have a hearing like this, but I want to thank our leadership, and I hope that days like today maybe light a little fire on the other side of the house to get this piece of legislation off the desk and onto the floor so that you all and the people that you work with can continue the great work that you do. So, thank you all. Happy holidays.

Madam Chair, I yield back.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you. With that, I will recognize Mr. Allred from Texas for 5 minutes.

Mr. ALLRED. Sure. Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you all for being here and putting up with our questions. This is a crucial moment for the FAA reauthorization process as we look to our colleagues in the Senate to take up our bill. And I really am proud, and I think you have seen a trend here of the bipartisan work that we did in this committee to try and make sure that we could secure the FAA going forward, but also air travel in general.

Mr. Santa, I want to begin with you, and I know you have gotten a lot of attention here today for good reason. But controllers at the airports in my region in the DFW area are working, as you have talked about today, 6 days a week, 10 hours a day. And we know that contributes to fatigue, to many things. And you have talked about the safety implications, I think, and you have discussed that in your testimony.

If you could, talk about the personal impacts that has. Because in my experience, part of recruitment and retention is that a job

is one that, yes, you can be compensated well for, but also that fits with a family. My wife and I have two small children, 4 and 2. If it doesn't work for your family, then it is hard to get new folks to come into a profession. So, what do you see as the personal impacts of this understaffing?

Mr. SANTA. Thanks for the question. I feel like I can talk about staffing crises at any facility that you bring up. And the Dallas area is one of the worst. You talk about Austin traffic, it is just exponentially higher.

I do have a little story here, I think, that really epitomizes the problems that we have. And I will talk about the personal aspect. When you talk about ZFW, which is the Fort Worth Air Route Traffic Control Center, they have 253 certified controllers. Our interim number was 290. That is 10 years old. The new target number is 295. The FAA Office of Finance and Management actually cuts a 10-year-old number to 264. They are working 6-day workweeks, 10-hour days, and the FAA Office of Finance and Management says, "You are pretty good." It is not where we are at.

And you talk about the personal interactions. This is a full-time job, full-time career, shift work, midnights, 6-day workweeks, 10-hour days. Nothing works well when it is critically staffed. You miss ball games, you miss your kids' events, you miss family events. You miss holidays. We are 24/7. This Christmas, there are going to be dozens of people that don't get to wake up and open presents on Christmas because the staffing is abysmal.

Specifically—and like I said, anybody that sits and talks to me, I can tell you a specific story about how short-staffed they are.

Mr. ALLRED. Well, and so, the understaffing can lead to more understaffing, because then it is harder to get folks to come into it.

Mr. Peterson, I wanted to turn to you, and I was so sorry to learn and hear—and I am glad that you mentioned in your testimony—about Michal Ingraham's death at the Austin airport in my home State. It is clear that ground workers play an indispensable role, from ensuring that baggage and cargo arrive at their intended destination to pushing back aircraft, and they should never face unnecessary dangers at their job. As you mentioned in your testimony, the House-passed bill requires the FAA to conduct a call-to-action review of ramp worker safety provisions. Can you expand on how that provision is vital to prevent tragic accidents and deaths like Michal's from ever happening again?

Mr. PETERSON. Sure, thank you. I think a couple things that are in the bill are critical.

One is that management and labor get together and figure out what is going on. The area on the ground hasn't been looked at in years. And obviously, the tarmac has changed. DFW, where I am from, as well, is a great example of that, just the expansion and the constant evolution of these airports. And yet the ground equipment and the markings and all those things on the side where we work remains the same. So, just finding ways to improve that, finding ways to put in areas for more safe movement on the ramp are critical, putting in place rules that work. And nobody knows that better than the people that work on the ground.

There is always this argument about cost that we always get into. You can't put a value on the cost of a life.

Mr. ALLRED. That is right.

Mr. PETERSON. The incident in Austin should have never happened. That situation is one of—that is one that was fatal. We constantly have people getting injured or maimed for no reason because this infrastructure hasn't been looked at in years, and it needs to be addressed. And the bill provides for that, which, again, I thank the committee for that.

Mr. ALLRED. Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Peterson. Thanks to our witnesses.

I yield back.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you, Mr. Allred. With that, I will recognize Mr. Perry for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERRY. I thank the chair and the ranking member for being open to diverse viewpoints. Thank you for being here, folks.

The aviation industry is in a state of chaos, in my opinion. Near-misses on tarmacs, massive delays and cancellations, and industry-wide workforce shortages with no end in sight. And I think we have kind of talked about all of them, but there has been a lot of back-slapping here today.

So, I am going to ask unanimous consent to enter into the record the following articles: November 11, 2023, Daily Mail, "Exclusive: U.S. airlines set for worst year ever with more than 1 million departures delayed so far in 2023—nearly a quarter of all flights—fueling holiday chaos fears"; November 15, 2023, New York Times, "Staffing and technology woes threaten aviation safety, report says"; September 15, 2023, Wall Street Journal, "Staffing shortage at air traffic control means more cuts of New York flights"; and July 22, 2023, CNN, "U.S. airline staffing is at its 'highest level' in decades. So why the flight delays?"

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Without objection, so ordered.

[The information follows:]

Article entitled, "EXCLUSIVE: U.S. Airlines Set for Worst Year Ever With More Than 1M Departures Delayed so far in 2023—Nearly a Quarter of All Flights—Fueling Holiday Chaos Fears," by Lewis Pennock, DailyMail.com, November 11, 2023, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry

EXCLUSIVE: U.S. AIRLINES SET FOR WORST YEAR EVER WITH MORE THAN 1M DEPARTURES DELAYED SO FAR IN 2023—NEARLY A QUARTER OF ALL FLIGHTS—FUELING HOLIDAY CHAOS FEARS

by Lewis Pennock

DailyMail.com, November 11, 2023

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12730425/US-airlines-set-worst-year-1M-departures-delayed-far-2023-nearly-QUARTER-flights-fueling-holiday-chaos-fears.html>

- More than one million flights were delayed from January to August, the fastest that the milestone has ever been reached, according to official departure data
- 22.33 percent of departures in 2023 have been delayed by 15 minutes or more
- The dismal figures come amid a series of other controversies this year, including mass cancellations, a shortage of pilots and a string of worrying near misses

U.S. airlines are on course for one of the worst ever years for flight delays, according to official data reviewed by DailyMail.com.

Airlines racked up a million delayed departures in record time in 2023 and nearly a quarter of flights so far this year have taken off late, the figures reveal.

The dismal data adds to a string of issues to blight the aviation industry this year, including mass cancelations, chronic staff shortages, a series of near-misses and the use of fake jet engine parts in dozens of large commercial aircraft.

The findings will also fuel fears of travel chaos through the busy Thanksgiving period and holiday season, when tens of millions of Americans will fly around the country to celebrate with loved ones. A recent survey found half of Americans plan to book a flight or hotel this holiday, putting further strain on the struggling industry.

DailyMail.com reviewed flight departure data from the Bureau of Transport Statistics, which tracks the country's leading carriers. The bureau defines a delayed departure as one which leaves the gate 15 minutes or more after its scheduled time.

From January to August this year, the period for which the most up-to-date data is available, 22.33 percent of flights were delayed. The total number of delayed departures was 1,015,057.

The previous annual record was 2007, when 21.1 percent of flights were delayed, putting 2023 well on track to set a new record.

The Bureau of Transport Statistics data includes annual breakdowns for every year from 1988 to the present day.

The eight-months timespan that it took to hit one million delays is also believed to be the shortest on record. The previous record was in 2007, when it took until September to pass one million delayed departures.

Data for delayed arrivals paints a similarly bleak picture. Between January and August 2023, 22.52 percent of arrivals were late by 15 minutes or more, the highest proportion for that period since at least 2014.

In 2007, the worst year for delayed arrivals, 24.20 percent of flights were delayed across the whole year.

Separate data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics also reveals that as delays have risen, air ticket prices have crept above their pre-covid highs after a dip during the pandemic. Passengers now face paying more for a worse service.

The average price of a domestic fare was \$391.79 in the second quarter of 2023, compared with \$357.07 for the same period in 2019.

The dire delays statistics comes after a summer of chaos and misery and American airports due to a chronic staffing shortages post-COVID and extreme weather events.

The Fourth of July holiday was blighted by thousands of cancellations. United Airlines was singled out for criticism after its passengers suffered most and many were left stranded in airports.

Weeks earlier, storms around the east coast and Midwest also caused huge disruption and nearly 10,000 flights were canceled in a single week.

Airlines started 2023 with a shortage of around 17,000 pilots, while the Federal Aviation Authority had a shortage of 3,000 air traffic controllers. There was also a shortage of thousands of mechanics.

The industry typically trains about 1,500 to 1,800 new pilots each year. Training a pilot can also take two years or longer, and cost more than \$100,000.

The dire shortage of staff this year came about in part because of mass layoffs during COVID, which were not reversed quickly enough as the sector rebounded when lockdowns were lifted.

After the chaos this summer, Transport Secretary Pete Buttigieg opened a federal investigation into airlines for what he termed 'unrealistic scheduling', or listing more flights than carriers can be safely operated.

Officials from the Federal Aviation Administration, which sets safety guidelines for the industry, have also taken action after a concerning series of near misses at airports and in the skies this year.

Bosses from the agency are holding 'runway safety meetings' with air traffic controllers at the nation's most problematic airports after a spate that included 46 close calls in January alone.

In the most serious incidents, aircraft carrying hundreds of passengers have come just within feet of a collision that could have caused a massive loss of life.

And there was also widespread disbelief among industry insiders and the public in September when it emerged dozens of aircraft used by the country's leading carriers have been fitted with uncertified jet engine parts.

A U.K.-based supplier, AOG Technics, allegedly sold parts with forged safety paperwork to jet engine maintenance firms and these parts ended up in at least 126 commercial aircraft.

Leading American airlines including Delta and United have been forced to ground planes that were affected by the scandal and a worldwide investigation is underway to identify other aircraft fitted with the suspicious parts. Aircraft in Europe, Australia and China have also been affected.

Article entitled, “Staffing and Technology Woes Threaten Aviation Safety, Report Says,” by Mark Walker, New York Times, November 15, 2023, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry

STAFFING AND TECHNOLOGY WOES THREATEN AVIATION SAFETY, REPORT SAYS

by Mark Walker

New York Times, November 15, 2023

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/15/us/politics/air-traffic-safety-faa.html>

The Federal Aviation Administration turned to outside experts after a string of near collisions. They called for addressing the shortage of air traffic controllers and improving aging tech.

A group of outside experts appointed by the Federal Aviation Administration called on Wednesday for “urgent action” to address safety risks in the nation’s aviation system, highlighting issues like staffing shortages among air traffic controllers and outdated technology.

The F.A.A. announced the formation of the group, the National Airspace System Safety Review Team, in April after a string of close calls at airports across the country, and the panel issued a 52-page report on Wednesday laying out its findings.

In addition to calling for the F.A.A. to address the shortage of air traffic controllers and improve its aging technology, the report also recommended changes in how the agency is funded, such as more broadly shielding it from government shut-downs.

“The current erosion in the margin of safety in the N.A.S. caused by the confluence of these challenges is rendering the current level of safety unsustainable,” the report said, referring to what is known as the National Airspace System.

The group of experts was led by Michael P. Huerta, who served as F.A.A. administrator under Presidents Barack Obama and Donald J. Trump. It also included other former federal officials and former union leaders.

“There are no easy short-term fixes to address many of these challenges,” Mr. Huerta told reporters on Wednesday. “Addressing risk in the N.A.S. requires the F.A.A., the administration, Congress and others across industry to work together collaboratively.”

Investigations published by The New York Times in August and in October revealed how the nation’s vaunted aviation safety system is under mounting stress. The Times found that close calls involving commercial airlines had been happening, on average, multiple times a week.

A dire shortage of air traffic controllers—The Times found that 99 percent of the country’s air traffic control facilities were understaffed—has been one major factor.

The report released on Wednesday also warned about the risks posed by aging technology. In January, an F.A.A. system outage caused flights to be grounded nationwide and led to a wave of delays and cancellations for travelers.

“The age and condition of F.A.A. facilities and equipment are elevating system risk to unsustainable levels, even before considering losses in efficiency from outdated technology,” the report said.

The agency has said that it has taken steps to reduce the risk of close calls at airports, such as by providing funding to reconfigure taxiways and improve runway lighting.

“The F.A.A. welcomes the independent Safety Review Team’s report, and we will thoroughly review the recommendations,” the agency’s new administrator, Michael G. Whitaker, whom the Senate confirmed last month, said in a statement. “We appreciate the team’s time and expertise to help us pursue our goal of zero serious close calls.”

The near misses have also caught the attention of Congress. A Senate subcommittee held a hearing on the topic last week, and among the witnesses was Jennifer L. Homendy, the chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board, which is investigating a number of close-call incidents.

“While these events are incredibly rare, our safety system is showing clear signs of strain that we cannot ignore,” Ms. Homendy said.

Article entitled, “Staffing Shortage at Air-Traffic Control Means More Cuts of New York Flights,” by Alison Sider, Wall Street Journal, September 15, 2023, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry

STAFFING SHORTAGE AT AIR-TRAFFIC CONTROL MEANS MORE CUTS OF NEW YORK
FLIGHTS

Delays and cancellations could increase without flying reductions, FAA says

by Alison Sider

Wall Street Journal, September 15, 2023

<https://www.wsj.com/business/airlines/staffing-shortage-at-air-traffic-control-means-more-cuts-of-new-york-flights-48a2fe7f>

A staffing shortage at a key New York air-traffic control facility will continue to disrupt travel through next fall, and airlines will be allowed to cut back on flying in the region for another year.

Airlines were allowed to reduce schedules in the New York area all summer, after the Federal Aviation Administration said that a facility there had only 54% of the fully-trained controllers it needed. On Friday, the FAA said the facility still doesn't have enough certified controllers to handle normal traffic levels.

The agency will allow airlines to forgo using up to 10% of their slots or runway timings through Oct. 26 next year at the three major airports serving New York City and for flights between New York and Washington D.C.'s Reagan National Airport.

Without extending the flying cuts, the FAA said it would expect delays and cancellations in New York to increase. Normally, carriers that don't use their takeoff and landing rights at certain airports risk losing them. The FAA encouraged airlines to trim flying during the busiest, most congested times of day.

Airlines for America, which represents major carriers, said it appreciated the extension.

Despite the reduced flying, the New York area has been prone to significant flight disruptions, particularly when bad weather hits. United Airlines Chief Executive Scott Kirby said the FAA's controller shortage is amplifying weather disruptions in the New York area.

“The impact of weather today is several times worse than it was historically,” he said at an aviation event in Washington, D.C., this week. “The same weather that in the past we could have managed though now can cause hundreds of delays—or hundreds of even cancellations.”

Airlines had sought an extension of the cutbacks, saying they needed more notice to be able to plan their schedules. JetBlue Airways Chief Executive Robin Hayes said at the same event that even the 10% reduction hadn't been deep enough.

“Even on days where we saw industry cancel flights and weather move out, it took a long time to get going again,” he said.

The FAA said it is working with the union that represents air-traffic controllers on a long-term solution to solve what it described as chronically low levels of fully certified controllers at the facility.

Article entitled, “U.S. Airline Staffing Is at Its ‘Highest Level’ in Decades. So Why the Flight Delays?” by Maureen O’Hare, CNN, July 22, 2023, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry

U.S. AIRLINE STAFFING IS AT ITS ‘HIGHEST LEVEL’ IN DECADES. SO WHY THE FLIGHT
DELAYS?

Air Travel Woes

by Maureen O’Hare

CNN, July 22, 2023

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/22/travel/travel-news-us-air-employment-flight-delays/index.html>

U.S. passenger airline employment is now at its highest level in over two decades, says a new statement from the International Air Transport Association (IATA) as carriers build up their workforces to meet the huge demand for post-pandemic travel.

However, passengers this summer are still facing “unacceptable delays and disruptions” because of a shortage of air traffic controllers in North America. The

IATA, an industry association that represents the world's airlines, is blaming that squarely on "poor planning" by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and NAV Canada, the Canadian air navigation services provider. But outdated technology, airline staffing issues and bad weather are also playing into recent air traffic meltdowns, CNN has previously reported.

There were more woes as medical teams were called to a passenger plane on the tarmac in Las Vegas to treat "heat-related discomfort," and an emergency evacuation slide from a United flight fell into a Chicago neighborhood.

If all this has got you wistful for a bygone "golden age of air travel," however, you'd be very wrong. When it comes to safety, accessibility and affordability, we've never had it so good.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

We ought to be honoring the great, competent people that work in the industry and the deserving travelers they serve. And that includes you folks. We are the greatest country in the world, the literal birthplace of aviation. And we have the Government telling airlines to cut flights, causing massive delays that lead our constituents to be stuck in the airport for hours on end, if they are lucky enough to catch their flight at all.

The situation is only going to get worse, due to a looming pilot shortage that, again, is largely the result of misguided regulations that hinder the ability of the free market to deliver the transportation experience our constituents deserve.

These are the issues that we should have addressed in the FAA reauthorization bill. Instead, the House passed a bill that kicks the can down the road for 5 years and allows the situation to fester, killing industry efficiency and threatening airline safety, which is why I did not support the bill.

While there are consequences to delaying the long-term FAA bill, the consequences of passing a bill that fails to remedy these significant threats to the industry may actually be worse. While there are some wins with the House-passed bill, this is the opportunity to put forth a truly transformational FAA reauthorization bill that allows the industry to adapt to the times and meet the moment, providing for the needs of the traveling public.

Now, I don't know what the Senate is doing over there. God bless them. I hope they are doing that. I don't believe they are doing that, but I hope that is why there is a delay.

But we can still do this if we go back to the drawing board and pass a bill that institutes real changes that will meaningfully address the following issues: increasing the pilot retirement age, a reform that was included in the House bill over the objections of the Big Four agreement; lowering the 1,500-hour requirement for flight certification to increase the pipeline of new pilots entering the industry, and removing the politics surrounding that issue; expanding the number of certified instructors; eliminating much of the Essential Air Service program that misallocates precious resources, which are pilots, flightcrews, ground crews, fuel, mechanical equipment, and planes to routes that are not economically viable at the expense of profitable routes; increasing the air traffic controller retirement age; spinning off the air traffic control system into a non-profit, nongovernmental organization similar to the situation in Canada that allows it to operate in an innovative, streamlined fashion; ensuring airline employees and air traffic controllers are hired based on merit and competence, rather than DEI metrics;

and eliminating the wasteful Green New Deal programs at the FAA to ensure the agency remains focused on its mission, which is safe and efficient travel.

Unfortunately, there are those in the administration, in industry, some in labor, some even folks that are working right here in the building who are benefiting from the status quo, and therefore seek to keep the system rigged in that favor, damn the consequences to our constituents, our bosses, and the flying public. We can, we should, and we must do better.

I yield the balance, Madam Chair.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you, Mr. Perry. I will now recognize the acting ranking member, Ms. Scholten from Michigan, for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you so much to our chairman and acting chairwoman, and to our Ranking Member Cohen for holding this important hearing. And thank you so much to all of our witnesses for bearing with us and coming in here, helping us to draw attention to the critical urgency of reauthorizing the FAA.

It bears repeating over and over and over again that the Senate's delay in passing the FAA reauthorization has created significant uncertainty for our aviation industry, and it is critical that this final authorization is passed by December 31. The time is ticking. Any further delays would negatively impact safety, infrastructure, and operations for our Nation's airports.

Of course, just like all of the Representatives here today, I am particularly concerned about what this means back home in west Michigan, impact on Gerald R. Ford International Airport and Muskegon County Airport in my district. They have benefited from the Airport Improvement Program funding, which is currently jeopardized. And I am particularly concerned about the impact and delays on these airports for these programs.

Mr. Bradbury, you mentioned that short-term extensions hinder the distribution of AIP funding to airports, and airports must then choose one of three options. I want to get into that just a little bit more. How are airports affected if they choose to accept their grants based on prorated calculations, and how is that impact different if they choose to wait for a reauthorization, defer, or carry over their entitlements?

Mr. BRADBURY. Great questions. And obviously, with Michigan, also a very tight construction season. And that is the biggest impact for a lot of our northern tier airports when it comes to construction.

And you can't prorate a project. That is the real unfortunate part. And I spoke in my testimony that it is a 15- to 20-percent cost every time you remobilize. So, it is inefficient, it is very inefficient. And it causes construction costs increases, which are really difficult for the industry and ultimately hold up a project.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you. Essential testimony for our record. Thank you so much.

Mr. Peterson, I want to talk about safety a minute. Like you, I am deeply concerned about the impacts of the delay that they have on safety for our workers. I am concerned not only for the workers themselves, but as a lawmaker and a protector of my constituents, I am concerned about their safety. And frankly, as a frequent trav-

eler myself, I am concerned about my own safety, someone who gets on a plane twice a week, a mother of two young children, and flies away from her family to serve our country and then hopefully back home safe again. This is personal to so many lawmakers, as well, and we want you to know that we take this issue personally, and the safety of the workers who help us get to and from our destination safely, as well.

I want to talk about what the impacts on staffing in particular will continue to look like if we face these delays, kick the can further and further down the road. Those have significant safety implications, as we have talked about here today and as we have seen firsthand.

So, what will the impact on workforce recruitment and retention be? We know you may not be able to predict with exact certainty, but talk to me about how you see some of that playing out if the Senate continues to delay.

Mr. PETERSON. Yes. Well, certainly the Senate delaying this isn't helpful by any means, and we want to see that get done.

One element on the maintenance side that I want to just speak to is, as a mechanic, the training during the COVID era, we couldn't train aircraft mechanics and that pipeline slowed down. So, we are seeing that come back up, now that people are able to get back into school and do the training. Again, it goes back to a lot of the schools aren't open anymore. Many of the college and even high school programs have just been shut down.

We can't get workers into the field if we don't have enough training facilities to get them into the field. So, this legislation provides the ability to do that, and we are thankful for that. This isn't new, though.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Right.

Mr. PETERSON. This has been something that we have been arguing about for years, and it goes back several years, about training facilities and training at home and not moving these jobs abroad to where we don't know who is performing what type of work on these aircrafts.

And again, the traveling public, yourself, your families deserve better.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. That is exactly right. Thank you so much.

I yield back the remainder.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you, Ms. Scholten. With that, I am going to recognize myself for 5 minutes, representing Oregon's Fifth Congressional District with Portland International Airport just outside of my district about 15 minutes away, and many municipal airports in the Pacific Northwest that, again, are under threat if we do not pass this FAA reauthorization.

So, again, good afternoon, and it is great that we are here today to discuss the continued push for FAA reauthorization, especially during the busiest time of year. And air travel and during the holidays is when people get most anxious about: Are they going to get somewhere on time?

Reports this year were that Thanksgiving travel set records. This past Sunday alone, TSA reported that almost 3 million travelers were screened. Luckily, there were no significant delays across the U.S. caused by weather or other means.

Mr. Santa, you state in your testimony that staffing shortages of air traffic controllers can pose serious risks to not only flight delays and cancellations, but in-flight safety, as well. And due to mandatory overtime scheduling, fatigue can be at risk. As you suggest, more accurate operational staffing targets developed by the Collaborative Resource Workgroup must be included in FAA's annual controller workforce plan.

Can you elaborate on what the CRWG has offered as solutions, and how they may address future delays, cancellations, or safety concerns, especially during holiday travel season?

Mr. SANTA. Thank you for the question. So, the CRWG numbers started with interviews of all of the 313 FAA facilities to see where they were at, see the needs and the desires of the collaborative groups locally. And the goal was to address 10-year-old expired numbers. Flight schools opened and close, vacation destinations change, corporate traffic ebbs and flows, and commercial traffic changes hubs and destinations, as well. To have a model, a staffing model that is 10 years old doesn't serve the industry or the facilities well.

So, the collaborative group that was jointly developed by the Air Traffic Organization at FAA and NATCA—and importantly, it was validated for transparency and repeatability by the MITRE Corporation—those numbers being implemented and used for the basis of the controller workforce plan will pay dividends for now and in the future to accurately reflect what we need at the facilities in the NAS.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you.

Of course, there are other reasons for flight delays. As part of the House-passed FAA, I supported an amendment to require DOT to improve reporting requirements for commercial flight cancellations or delays, with the goal of keeping travelers more informed and leading to strategies to mitigate the causes of those delays. Mr. Bradbury, how might this amendment improve the traveling experience for passengers at airports?

And further, do you believe airports have a duty to passengers when flights get delayed or canceled, and can you explain how airports are working towards helping to improve that experience?

Mr. BRADBURY. Absolutely. The experience—obviously, everything comes down to our passengers. We don't exist without passengers. And our ability to connect the passenger to the air transportation system is paramount. So, it is critical that we work together to make sure we mitigate issues and make it a seamless travel experience for all of our passengers, those with mobility improvements, mobility and other disabilities. And this bill helps us to keep that going.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Well, thank you. I think the theme is consistent.

We will have one more at this point. Am I correct? Oh, we are going to have two more, good.

But the theme is correct. We want to make sure that we get this passed. We are working bipartisan bicameral is what we are hoping, that the Senate will step up and get this done. Because I think without this, we are going to see a further delineation.

And as a new legislator, I mean, this is something that we are counting on, and that we are working hard to do. So, thank you for being here today.

And with that I will yield back the rest of my time and, Mr. DeSaulnier—

Mr. DESAULNIER [interposing]. Nicely done.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER [continuing]. It is your turn for 5 minutes.

Mr. DESAULNIER. You must have taken French in high school.

Well, I want to thank you, and I want to thank the committee for having this hearing.

I have to say I look at so many familiar faces who I have worked with on my input on the reauthorization—I am going to date myself here—I feel like Charlie Brown with Lucy with the football, and Lucy would be the Senate. This was such a success, and there were some—there were things in it that I didn't like, and standing alone I would not have voted for, and they are trying to wrestle with those things. So, it is with a great deal of anticipation that I hope that we get this done.

And in addition, having been involved so much with the Safe Landings Act, which—so much of it that was my bill that came out of the near-miss at SFO 10 years ago, that there is so much possibility, but there is also so much risk with the near-misses and the pressure on the system.

Mr. Santa, I was just up in SFO's tower again, your folks. Every time I land, I am afraid they are going to [gesturing] "Follow me." It was wonderful, as always. I would like to do more of them in other parts of the country. But what I wanted to talk to you about here, every time I go, every time I talk, is the illustration—and it is part of our challenge in getting it reauthorized—is: When does technology benefit?

When is it interacted, which, in our Safe Landings Act, clearly those investments have made landings safer by upgrading the technology.

And then the human factors of which I spent so much time with the pilots and with your folks, recognizing you need trained professionals.

And also recognizing, as having been a long-time elected from the San Francisco Bay area, and proud of the tech industry, but also being very aware of the marketing in some of this technology is getting it right.

So, when I was up in the tower, it was sort of interesting. There was an incident where the technology didn't work on one of the planes that ran a stoplight, a stop sign on a taxiway. It wasn't dangerous, but it was interesting just hearing the staff respond going, "Whoa." So, getting this right, how do we evaluate the technology to make sure?

And the other part is to make sure not just on the disparity in high-cost areas where so many members are, and I hear when I talk to them, that even with the differential, it is not enough to live in places like the bay area because the cost of housing, but then the continuous training.

So, the vetting and the technology on the procurement side, making sure the people who actually have to use the technology, the

pilots and your folks are part of that to make sure that there is real, true value in it, and they are not being seduced by the marketing of the technology, and then the continuous training that they have to get, and how we have provided for that for your members and for the FAA.

Mr. SANTA. Yes, the most important asset we have is our people, is our controllers. They are talented, they are professional. They take a lifetime of effort to learn their skills, and they use them every single day. Thousands of decisions, safety critical decisions are made every hour you are on position.

The technology that we talk about subsidizes that. It helps that. It allows you more information to evaluate. It allows you quicker decisionmaking tools. And to be part of that, collaboratively to be part of that, to determine the direction of that is essential because, as I said, the essential nature of our controllers and our people needs to be evaluated by every piece of technology that comes.

Luckily, we are involved in those workgroups. Unfortunately, the funding and the staffing really isn't there to fulfill them to finality or to completion.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Mr. Bradbury, maybe your experience. I mean, we have got this pressure on the airports to move people through. I have talked to my friends in the industry about their profit margins, but technology, getting it right, so, as Mr. Santa said, it is a complement to the humans being professionally trained.

Mr. BRADBURY. Absolutely. Technology is critical to what we do every day. And we are seeing those impacts.

Having FAA reauthorization gives us more flexibility around terminal funding, as well. And huge—we are looking at replacing passenger boarding bridges, three, four, five, six, seven at our terminal just to really improve that experience and make sure we have all the technology and all of the equipment in place to respond to our passenger needs.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Yes. And just the last thing about SFO. Years ago, there was a controversial proposal, because of the volume, to add another runway in the bay, and it was stopped. But the promise was, technology would keep it as safe and keep the volumes as high. And now, anecdotally, I hear that that is a challenge.

So, I appreciate it. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. Thank you. I will now recognize Ms. Wilson from Florida for 5 minutes.

Ms. WILSON OF FLORIDA. Thank you for this necessary hearing today.

As we work towards the Federal Aviation Administration authorization, we must maintain our global leadership in aviation. To do this, we must consider timely airport infrastructure upgrades and a commitment to bolstering our security.

In my district, the Miami International Airport is one of the most active airports for international passengers, with more flights to Latin America and the Caribbean than any other U.S. airport. However, the lack of a Federal Aviation Administration bill has increased security concerns, as seen in a distressing incident this Monday in Miami International Airport. A passenger on an American Airlines flight assaulted multiple airline workers, sending one

to the hospital with permanent injuries. This is utterly unacceptable.

Our aviation workforce must remain safe and protected from dangerous passengers. Unfortunately, the delayed reauthorization leaves newly confirmed FAA Administrator Whitaker without necessary congressional guidance. He needs clear direction on Congress' FAA priorities to move the FAA forward. Without such direction, we risk the future of the aviation industry and jobs. Jobs, jobs, jobs has always been my mantra, and the lack of congressional direction will continue to affect the aviation workforce negatively.

An FAA reauthorization bill is not just a piece of legislation. It symbolizes a commitment, the safety of every traveler, a pledge to foster economic development, and an investment in the technological advancement that will propel aviation into the future. With that I have a few questions for the witnesses.

Mr. Peterson, in section 538 of the FAA reauthorization bill, the bill creates a task force to address issues with the interference of aviation workforce members. Can you talk about the importance of this task force, and can you highlight the labor representative's critical role in this task force?

Mr. PETERSON. Yes, thank you. So, first and foremost, I am aware of the situation in Miami. And that is exactly why this is needed.

The folks that work in aviation, we are just trying to do our job, get passengers from point A to point B. When something doesn't go right with a passenger service agent or a flight attendant, it seems that now passengers feel they can abuse them and get physically violent.

The task force that could be put in place, one, is to figure out how to lower that temperature when those situations happen. And then the second piece is, we have got to find a way, when this does happen, that people are convicted of the right crime. And again, there is jurisdictional issues that come up not necessarily inside the airport, but certainly on the aircraft with the flight attendants that we deal with.

But the task force between labor and, so to speak, management working together to figure out how to eliminate those types of situations as best as possible is critical. This bill provides for that, and it has been a long time coming. As we have seen in the past couple of years, these numbers just keep escalating. There has got to be a way to bring them down.

Ms. WILSON OF FLORIDA. Thank you. Mr. Peterson, the number of unruly passengers in 2023 drastically outpaced the numbers pre-COVID. This trend has been a growing problem throughout the Nation. Locally, we have seen numerous incidents at the Fort Lauderdale airport. Can you talk about the importance of protecting the workers in the airport, be it gate agents, TSA employees, everyone?

Mr. PETERSON. Yes, and I think it goes hand in hand, in-flight or on the ground. The incident at Fort Lauderdale involved one of our agents, a Spirit agent, just recently. Again, I am very familiar with the situation.

There is this belief, again, that if you are not getting what you want in an airport from an agent, you can abuse them. And it is just simply—there has got to be an agreement somehow between labor and management that passengers who do this, one, aren't allowed to fly for at least some period of time. And the problem we have today is none of that data can be shared, so, they just go from one airline to another if an airline does ban somebody. This isn't good for the airport infrastructure, Fort Lauderdale being a great example. This has been an ongoing issue in Fort Lauderdale multiple times with people.

And so, we have got to find a way to put penalties in place for people that are bad actors in the airport or on the aircraft, and protect the workers in both those areas.

Ms. WILSON OF FLORIDA. Thank you.

I yield back.

Mrs. CHAVEZ-DEREMER. The gentlelady yields back, thank you.

Are there any further questions from members of the committee who have not been recognized?

Seeing none, that concludes our hearing today. I want to thank each and every witness that was here today for your time and your testimony.

And with that, this committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:05 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]