FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2024: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON IMPLEMENTATION ONE YEAR LATER

(119–23)

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON
AVIATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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MAY 30, 2025

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Subcommittee on Aviation
FROM: Staff, Subcommittee on Aviation
RE: Subcommittee Hearing on "*FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024: Stakeholder Perspectives on Implementation One Year Later*"

I. PURPOSE

The Subcommittee on Aviation of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on June 4, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. ET in 2167 Rayburn House Office Building to receive testimony at a hearing entitled, "*FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024: Stakeholder Perspectives on Implementation One Year Later*." The hearing will provide representatives of the aerospace industry an opportunity to share their perspectives on the progress made by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA or Agency) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) in implementing the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. The Subcommittee will hear testimony from the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, National Business Aviation Association, Association of Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International, Southwest Airlines Pilots Association, and Association of Flight Attendants—CWA, AFL–CIO.

II. BACKGROUND

On May 16, 2024, President Biden signed H.R. 3935, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118–63) into law.[1] FAARA 2024 reauthorizes civil aviation programs within the FAA through fiscal year 2028. Enactment of FAARA 2024 followed a series of four short-term extensions of authorizations after the previous reauthorization law, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (FAARA 2018; P.L. 115–254), expired on October 1, 2023.[2] Support for final passage of H.R. 3935 was overwhelmingly bipartisan. The Senate passed an amendment to H.R. 3935 by a vote of 88 yeas to 4 nays and the House agreed to the amendment by a vote of 387 yeas to 26 nays.[3]

[1] Press Release, THE WHITE HOUSE, *Bill Signed: H.R. 3935*, (May 16, 2024), *available at* https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/05/16/press-release-bill-signed-h-r-3935/.

[2] Div. B, Title II of the Continuing Appropriations Act, 2024 and Other Extensions Act, Pub. L. No. 118–15, 137 Stat. 71; Airport and Airway Extension Act of 2023, Part II, Pub. L. No. 118–34; Airport and Airway Extension Act of 2024, Pub. L. No. 118–41; Airport and Airway Extension Act of 2024, Part II, Pub. L. No. 118–60.

[3] CONCUR IN THE S. AMDT TO H.R. 3935, CLERK, UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, *Roll Call 200*, 118th Cong., 2nd Session, (May 15, 2024), *available at* https://clerk.house.gov/Votes/2024200.; H.R. 3935, As Amended, CLERK, UNITED STATES SENATE, *Roll Call 162*, 118th Cong., 2nd Session, (May 9, 2024), *available at* https://www.senate.gov/legislative/LIS/roll__call__votes/vote1182/vote__118__2__00162.htm.

III. KEY PILLARS OF THE FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2024

In developing FAARA 2024, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure received over 2,100 unique requests from Members of Congress and aviation industry stakeholders and held five hearings focused on reauthorizing civil aviation programs in the first four months of the 118th Congress. FAARA 2024 contains approximately 500 requirements for the FAA, including mandates to take various actions, procure certain equipment, issue regulations, prepare reports to Congress, and conduct studies, among other responsibilities. As we move past the one-year anniversary of FAARA 2024 being signed into law, the FAA continues to implement the provisions of FAARA 2024. This memo reflects the status of some of FAARA 2024's mandates and key programs within the law.

UPHOLDING AVIATION SAFETY

The United States experienced one of the safest periods in commercial aviation on record from 2012 through 2024, during which three fatalities occurred on scheduled domestic air carriers, compared to 140 passenger fatalities in the previous decade.[4] Tragically, our aviation ecosystem has experienced several accidents this year that underscore the importance of continued progress on aviation safety. On January 29, 2025, American Eagle flight 5342 collided with an Army UH–60 Black Hawk helicopter while on final approach to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). This collision resulted in the tragic loss of 67 lives after both aircraft crashed into the Potomac River.[5]

Furthermore, the United States has also seen several near-misses at airports in the last few years.[6] For example, two aircraft almost collided on February 4, 2023, at Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, when a FedEx aircraft was cleared to land on the same runway as a Southwest aircraft, carrying 128 passengers and crew members, which was cleared to take off.[7] A National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) report noted the aircraft came within 150 to 170 feet of each other during this incident and attributed the near-miss to dense fog and a lack of surface detection equipment that could have alerted the air traffic controllers to a potential collision.[8] Unfortunately, this is just one of many examples. More recently, there was a loss of separation when an Army Black Hawk and a Delta Airlines flight, on approach to DCA, came within less than one mile and 400 feet of one another.[9] This concerning trend in safety incidents further emphasizes the need for continued improvements in aviation safety. FAARA 2024 includes nearly 80 provisions aimed at enhancing and improving America's aviation safety.[10]

Zero Tolerance for Near-Misses and Incursions

Section 347 of FAARA 2024 requires the FAA to establish the Runway Safety Council to develop strategies to address airport surface safety risks, among other tasks, to improve surface safety.[11] Additionally, the FAA is tasked with identifying and deploying technologies, equipment, and systems, such as surface surveillance and detection systems, that improve onboard situational awareness for flight crewmembers and enhance the safety of ground operations at all medium hub, large hub, and other airports that lack surface surveillance capabilities.[12] This section requires airport surface surveillance systems to be deployed and operational at all medium and large hub airports within five years.[13]

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[4] NTSB, U.S. CIVIL AVIATION STATISTICS (2021), *available at* https://www.ntsb.gov/safety/Pages/research.aspx, (last visited Dec. 4, 2024).

[5] NTSB, AVIATION INVESTIGATION PRELIMINARY REPORT (2025), *available at* https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/Documents/DCA25MA108%20Prelim.pdf.

[6] Sydney Ember and Emily Steel, *Airline Close Calls Happen Far More Often Than Previously Known*, THE NEW YORK TIMES, (Aug. 21, 2023), *available at* https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/08/21/business/airline-safety-close-calls.html.

[7] NTSB, RUNWAY INCURSION AND OVERFLIGHT, SOUTHWEST AIRLINES FLIGHT 708, BOEING 737–700, N7827A, AND FEDERAL EXPRESS FLIGHT 1432, BOEING 767–300, N297FE (2023), *available at* https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/Pages/DCA23FA149.aspx.

[8] Press Release, NTSB, *Air Traffic Control Issues, Lack of Safety Technology Led to Near Collision on Foggy Texas Runway* (June 6, 2024), *available at* https://www.ntsb.gov/news/press-releases/Pages/NR20240606.aspx.

[9] Phil Helsel, Courtney Kube and Mosheh Gains, *2 planes were ordered to 'go around' because of Army copter near Reagan Airport*, NBC NEWS, (May 3, 2025) *available at* https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/2-planes-ordered-go-army-copter-reagan-airport-rcna204588.

[10] FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, Pub. Law. No. 118–63. [hereinafter FAARA 2024].

[11] *Id.* at § 347, 138 Stat. 1104.

[12] *Id.*

[13] *Id.*

While the requirements under this section are segmented over the course of five years, to date, the Agency has established a Runway Safety Council and consulted with relevant stakeholders to identify viable technologies that may provide enhanced surface surveillance capabilities as well as improve onboard situational awareness for crewmembers.[14] In June 2024, the FAA deployed the Surface Awareness Initiative (SAI), which provides timely and accurate depictions of both aircraft and vehicles that are transmitting Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS–B) on the surface movement areas of an airport in all weather conditions.[15] As of February 2025, SAI is currently operational at 18 airports; and the FAA plans to have 32 additional sites operational by December 31, 2025.[16] In March 2024, the FAA launched the Approach Runway Verification (ARV) system to provide controllers with visual and audible alerts if an approaching aircraft is lined up to land on the wrong airport surface. As of April 2025, ARV is operational at 102 facilities, and the FAA expects it will be operational at an additional 50 facilities by end of 2025.[17] In March of 2025, the FAA deployed Runway Incursion Devices (RID), a memory aid controllers use to provide additional situational awareness of occupied and closed runways, at 74 airports.[18]

Additionally, as part of Congress' budget reconciliation effort, the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure approved the appropriation of $500 million for the FAA to carry out runway safety and airport surface surveillance projects identified in section 347.[19]

Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing Program

To encourage the voluntary sharing of safety information, the FAA introduced the Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing (ASIAS) system. ASIAS is a comprehensive database of safety data and analysis from government and industry sources. Section 348 requires the FAA to implement improvements to the ASIAS program with respect to safety data sharing and risk mitigation.[20] Specifically, the new law requires the FAA to: develop predictive capabilities to anticipate emerging safety risks, establish a robust process for prioritizing request for safety information, identify industry segments not yet included in the program to increase the rate of participation, establish processes for obtaining and analyzing aggregate data, and integrate safety data obtained from unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) operators.[21]

The Agency conducted an initial briefing on its efforts with Committee staff, in line with the statutory requirements, on November 12, 2024, where it outlined ASIAS metrics, safety improvements, and how they are using aggregate data for safety analysis.[22] Additionally, the FAA asserted that it will implement a new advanced technology tool to more rapidly process safety data and produce relevant safety intelligence. The FAA projects to fully implement section 348 by the 2027 statutory requirement.[23]

Don Young Alaska Aviation Safety Initiative

Aviation is essential in Alaska, as 82 percent of the state's communities are inaccessible by road.[24] However, aviation operators in Alaska face unique challenges compared to operators in the contiguous states due in large part to the state's challenging geography and topography, unpredictable weather, and relative lack of aviation and air traffic control infrastructure. Recognizing the aviation safety challenges in Alaska, section 342 establishes the Don Young Alaska Aviation Safety Initiative

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[14] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *2024 FAA Reauthorization Hill Update* (Apr. 10, 2025, 12:00pm EST) (Slides on file with Comm.) [hereinafter Hill Update].

[15] FAA, *Surface Safety Portfolio* (March 19, 2025), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/surface-safety-portfolio.

[16] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *Airport Surface Detection and Surveillance Systems Timeline & Action Plan* (May 16, 2025) (slides on file with Comm.).

[17] *Id.*

[18] *Supra* note 15.

[19] H. COMM. ON TRANSP. & INFRASTRUCTURE, Committee Print, providing for reconciliation pursuant to H. Con. Res. 14, the Concurrent Resolution on the Budget for Fiscal Year 2025 (as reported on Apr. 30, 2025) [hereinafter Committee Print].

[20] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 348, 138 Stat. 1107.

[21] *Id.*

[22] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, § 348: Improvements to Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing Program* (Dec. 19, 2024 at 2:45pm EST) (Slides on file with Comm.).

[23] Hill Update *supra* note 14.

[24] ALASKA DEPT. OF TRANSP. AND PUB. FACILITIES, *Statewide Aviation, available at* https://dot.alaska.gov/stwdav/.

(DYAASI).[25] The objective of the DYAASI is to reduce the number of fatal accidents in Alaska and the territories by 90 percent from 2019 to 2033 and eliminate fatal accidents for Part 135 operations by 2033. DYASSI requires the FAA to install reliable automated weather systems at certain airports, install and continually assess the state of weather cameras, and implement certain NTSB recommendations.[26] The FAA submitted their annual report to the Committee on May 16, 2025, and continues to work on completing the additional mandates in this provision which are segmented out over the course of three years.[27]

Deterring Crewmember Interference

Due to troubling incidents involving unruly passengers in recent years, FAARA 2024 helps ensure flight crews and passengers are protected.[28] Section 432 directs the FAA to convene a task force to develop standards and best practices relating to suspected interference with cabin or flight crew, security screening personnel, or flight attendants.[29] This section also requires the FAA to modify the required preflight briefings to inform passengers that it is against Federal law to assault or threaten to assault any individual onboard an aircraft or to interfere with duties of a crewmember.[30] Furthermore, section 435 requires airlines to establish formal policies protecting airline personnel and passengers from sexual assault and harassment.[31] The FAA continues partnering with the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and has leveraged the existing Inflight Security Work Group to jointly develop best practices to comply with this section.[32]

GROWING THE AVIATION WORKFORCE

FAARA 2024 incorporates several provisions to address the hiring and training bottlenecks most commonly affecting pilots, aircraft mechanics, air traffic controllers, aviation safety inspectors, and other key aviation roles. These aviation professions are closely regulated, require significant training and experience to achieve FAA certification and are essential to the safe operation of the National Airspace System (NAS). The provisions included in FAARA 2024 related to improving FAA services and regulatory processes are likely to be highlighted during the hearing as the aviation industry's growth is highly dependent on adequate staffing, robust investment in FAA resources, and timely decision-making. Provisions of interest to aviation stakeholders range from directing the FAA to promulgate rulemakings in a timely manner, leveraging various Federal training initiatives, and issuing airmen and operator certificates, among other responsibilities and authorities carried out by the Agency.

Air Traffic Controller Staffing

For several years, the FAA and the aviation industry reported a need for a right-sized and qualified FAA workforce commensurate with the Agency's responsibilities. The pandemic exacerbated the challenges felt by the Agency's Air Traffic Organization (ATO), which faces significant challenges in hiring and training controllers at a rate necessary to meet increased travel demand.[33] In the latest Aerospace forecast for the 2024–2044 period, the FAA notes that "with robust air travel demand growth in 2024 and steady growth thereafter, [the FAA] expect[s] increased activity growth that has the potential to increase controller workload."[34]

To address the controller workforce bottleneck in the aviation system, section 437 directs the FAA to set the minimum hiring target for new air traffic controllers, for each of fiscal years 2024 through 2028, to the maximum number of individuals trained at the FAA Air Traffic Control Academy.[35] Additionally, this section directs

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[25] 49 U.S.C. § 44745.

[26] *Id.*

[27] *See e.g.* Email from FAA to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure Staff (May 16, 2025, 8:57 p.m. ET)

[28] Mark Walker, *F.A.A. Refers More Unruly Passenger Cases to Justice Department*, N.Y. TIMES, (Aug. 21, 2024), *available at* https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/21/us/politics/faa-unruly-passengers-fbi.html.

[29] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 432, 138 Stat. 1173.

[30] *Id.*

[31] *Id.* at § 435, 138 Stat. 1175.

[32] *2024 FAA Reauthorization, Implementation Update*, FAA, Power Point Presentation to H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure staff (Oct. 8, 2024) (on file with Comm.).

[33] *Turbulence Ahead: Consequences of Delaying a Long-Term FAA Bill: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong., (Nov. 30, 2023) (statement of Rich Santa, President, National Air Traffic Controllers Association).

[34] FED. AVIATION ADMIN., FORECAST HIGHLIGHTS (2024–2044) at 4, *available at* https://www.faa.gov/dataresearch/aviation/aerospaceforecasts/2024-forecast-highlights.pdf.

[35] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 437, 138 Stat. 1176.

the Transportation Research Board (TRB) to identify the most appropriate staffing model for future air traffic controller workforce needs and requires the FAA to revise its staffing standards to adopt this staffing model, and allows the FAA to implement any other necessary TRB recommendations. As the TRB study is conducted, the section requires the FAA to adopt the staffing methodologies developed by the Collaborative Resource Workgroup (CRWG), a joint FAA and National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) entity. To date, the FAA has entered into an agreement with the TRB to conduct the study and expects the TRB to submit the required report to the FAA and Congress in the summer of 2025.[36] The FAA is continuing to work to meet the mandates set forth in FAARA 2024.[37]

Relatedly, Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy has announced several reforms aimed at "supercharging" the hiring of air traffic controllers. Among the Department's efforts, the FAA will increase the starting salaries for candidates who attend the FAA's ATC Academy by 30 percent. Additionally, the Administration modified the hiring process for controllers, with the goal of expediting the hiring timeline by approximately four months.[38] Furthermore, on May 1, 2025, Secretary Duffy announced the FAA will begin offering incentive packages to (1) keep experienced controllers from retiring, (2) provide new opportunities for veteran military controllers looking to transition into the civil side of air traffic control, and (3) expand the number of instructors at the FAA's Air Traffic Control Academy in Oklahoma.[39] These reforms have garnered bipartisan support and work to fulfil the Congressional intent of section 437 of FAARA 2024.[40] The FAA projects to hire at least 2,000 controllers this year and has referred more than 8,320 candidates to take the Air Traffic Skills Assessment (ATSA).[41]

Airman Medical Certificate Modernization

Pilots must obtain and maintain an FAA medical certificate to operate aircraft, and for commercial pilots, it is a requirement for employment.[42] Section 411 establishes a working group to review the FAA's medical processes, policies, procedures, and make recommendations to the Administrator to ensure the timely and efficient certification of airmen. Among its tasks, this working group will assess the FAA's special issuance process, determine the appropriateness of the list of medical conditions under which an Air Medical Examiner (AME) can issue a medical certificate, and review mental health protocols and approved medications, including any actions taken resulting from recommendations by the Mental Health and Aviation Medical Clearances Aviation Rulemaking Committee.[43] It is expected that the FAA will respond to the working group's findings by taking necessary action to streamline the medical certification process and breakdown barriers for applicants.[44] The FAA established the working group, as required by section 411, in November 2024. Within the working group, the FAA also established an *Aviation Workforce Mental Health Task Group* who held their last meeting on April 18, 2025, and are currently working on developing more detailed project plans.[45] The FAA expects to meet the deadlines for all requirements of this section.

Federal Aviation Workforce Development Programs

FAARA 2018 established the Aviation Workforce Development (AWD) Grants program to fund outreach and educational efforts focused on growing the United States aircraft pilot and aviation maintenance workforce. This program enjoys broad support from aviation stakeholders, as it encourages collaboration between government, industry, and local entities to address skills gaps, while encouraging more Ameri-

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[36] Hill Update *supra* note 14.
[37] *Id.*
[38] Press Release, DEP'T OF TRANSP., *U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Announces Air Traffic Control Hiring Supercharge at FAA Academy* (Feb. 27, 2025), *available at* https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-announces-air-traffic-controller-hiring.
[39] *Id.*
[40] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 411, 138 Stat. 1176.
[41] Press Release, FAA, *U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Unveils New Package to Boost Air Traffic Controller Workforce* (May 1, 2025), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/us-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-unveils-new-package-boost-air-traffic-controller.
[42] FAA, *Mental Health & Aviation Medical Clearances ARC Recommendation Report* (Apr. 1, 2024), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/Mental__Health__ARC__Final__Report__RELEASED.pdf.
[43] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 437, 138 Stat. 1156.
[44] Hill Update *supra* note 14.
[45] *Id.*

cans to pursue good-paying careers in aviation.[46] Section 440 of FAARA 2024 builds on the successes of the AWD Grants program by establishing a new eligibility for aviation manufacturing to ensure the manufacturing sector has a robust talent pool to recruit from in the coming decades.[47] FAARA 2024 authorizes funding levels for the aviation maintenance, aircraft pilot, and aviation manufacturing development programs at $20 million respectively for each of fiscal years 2025 through 2028.[48] This section also invests $12 million annually in the new Willa Brown Aviation Education Program to expand outreach and aviation education opportunities in low-income and underrepresented communities.[49] In January 2025, the FAA released the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the aviation maintenance and aircraft pilot grant programs;[50] however, the aviation manufacturing grant program has not yet been established.[51]

Improving Safety-Critical Staffing at FAA

The FAA's Flight Standards Service (FSS) and Aircraft Certification Service (AIR) aviation safety inspectors are responsible for the certification, education, oversight, and enforcement of the NAS.[52] Given increased compliance requirements on manufacturers and operators, ongoing supply chain quality issues, enhanced scrutiny of safety culture across the aviation ecosystem, and the emergence of more advanced aerospace technologies in United States airspace, it is critical that this safety workforce be fully staffed to meet current and future industry demand. Sections 429, 430, and 431 of FAARA 2024 collectively require a wholistic review of FAA's safety critical workforce, including staffing for safety inspectors, to ensure the agency can efficiently and effectively fulfill its aviation safety mission.[53] Furthermore, section 428 directs the FAA to utilize its existing direct hire authorities to hire more individuals for positions related to aircraft certification and aviation safety, including in positions that support the safe integration of new airspace entrants.[54] To date, FAA has not provided an update on implementation on these provisions.

IMPROVING THE PASSENGER EXPERIENCE

The COVID–19 pandemic caused major difficulties for the airline industry, with airline revenue passenger miles falling by 96 percent from January 2020 to April 2020.[55] As COVID–19 restrictions began to lift, air carriers experienced a greater than anticipated increase in air travel demand. This led to capacity and staffing constraints, which can pose significant operational challenges.[56] Additionally, staffing shortages at air traffic control facilities, severe weather, and post-pandemic driven changes in air traffic further contributed to delays and cancellations across the country.[57] As the airline industry continues to navigate air travel post COVID–19 pandemic, the Committee understands the importance of continuing to improve the comprehensive travel experience for all passengers to ensure that travelers arrive at their destination safely and efficiently. FAARA 2024 includes over 30 provisions to enhance the passenger experience and make flying more accessible for individuals with disabilities.[58]

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[46] Pub. L. No. 115–254 § 625, 132 Stat. 3405.
[47] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 440, 138 Stat. 1179.
[48] *Id.*
[49] *Id.*
[50] FAA, *Aviation Workforce Development Grants*, (March 3, 2025), *available at*: https://www.faa.gov/about/office__org/headquarters__offices/ang/grants/awd.
[51] Update from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *FAA Quarterly Briefing on 2024 FAA Reauthorization Implementation* (December 1, 2024 11:22am EST) (Email on file with Comm.).
[52] *Strengthening the Aviation Workforce: Hearing Before the S. Comm. on Commerce, Space and Transportation*, 118th Cong. (Mar. 16, 2023) (statement of David Spero, National President, Professional Aviation Safety Specialists).
[53] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 429, § 430, § 431, 138 Stat. 1171, 1172, 1173.
[54] *Id.* at § 428, 138 Stat. 1170.
[55] *Air Passenger Revenue Miles*, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, *available at* https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/AIRRPMTSID11.
[56] Michael B. Baker, *Airlines Prepare for Operational Challenges as Demand Rebounds*, BUSINESS TRAVEL NEWS, (Aug. 4, 2021), *available at* https://www.businesstravelnews.com/Transportation/Air/Airlines-Prepare-for-Operational-Challenges-as-Demand-Rebounds.
[57] Taylor Rains, *Flight cancellations are spiking in part because this air traffic control center in Florida is severely understaffed, airline group says*, BUSINESS INSIDER, (June 24, 2022), *available at* https://www.businessinsider.com/air-traffic-control-staffing-shortage-causing-flight-cancellations-alpa-2022-6. [hereinafter BUSINESS INSIDER].
[58] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 517, 138 Stat. 1198, 1199.

Passenger Experience Advisory Committee

For commercial airline passengers, the air transportation journey often begins at the curb or parking lot of the departure airport and ends at the same point at the destination airport. During that timeframe, a passenger's unique experience is affected by factors including, but not limited to, airlines, airports, airport contractors and vendors, and air traffic management system and operations. Section 517 creates a Passenger Experience Advisory Committee tasked with evaluating and providing recommendations to improve the comprehensive passenger experience.[59] The DOT has not provided an update on the establishment of the advisory committee.

Accessibility

The United States Census Bureau estimates that 44.1 million Americans, over 13 percent of individuals, have a disability, which may include those related to physical mobility, hearing, vision, or cognition.[60] FAARA 2024 includes several requirements for the DOT to improve travel and access for people with disabilities. For instance, sections 542 and 543 direct the DOT to issue rulemaking to develop minimum training standards for airline personnel and contractors who assist passengers with disabilities using wheelchairs when boarding or deplaning, as well as standards regarding the stowage of scooters and wheelchairs used by passengers with disabilities onboard commercial aircraft.[61] In December 2024, DOT issued a final rule in compliance with the reauthorization law.[62]

AIRSPACE MODERNIZATION

The FAA's Air Traffic Organization (ATO) is responsible for operating the ATC system, which includes maintaining the technical and physical infrastructure necessary to operate the NAS, and employing and training highly skilled workers to ensure the proper and safe functioning of the NAS.[63] Approximately 14,000 air traffic controllers, 4,100 air traffic supervisors and air traffic managers, 2,200 engineers, and 5,800 maintenance technicians make up ATO's workforce.[64] FAARA 2024 contains several provisions to improve the ATC system, including modernizing aging ATC systems and technologies, and expediting the deployment of airspace modernization technologies and procedures.

NextGen Programs

To meet an anticipated growth in air traffic, in 2007, the FAA launched a series of initiatives to revamp the Nation's ATC system known as "NextGen."[65] Specifically, NextGen initiatives aim to reduce the required separation between aircraft, resulting in more efficient routes and decreased congestion. These initiatives should provide a better experience for the traveling public.[66] However, NextGen programs have been vulnerable to delays and cost-overruns.[67] According to a September 2024 GAO report, NextGen activities' initial completion dates of 2025 have been delayed to 2030.[68] Although anticipated costs for NextGen programs have fallen back in line with original estimates, challenges remain for FAA's continued implementation, including uncertainty of future funding, unanticipated system requirements, and aircraft owners' equipage to fully utilize NextGen improvements, FAA's leadership stability, and cybersecurity issues.[69]

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[59] *Id.*

[60] United States Census Bureau, *Anniversary of Americans With Disabilities Act: July 26, 2024*, (July 26, 2024), *available at* https://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2024/disabilities-act.html.

[61] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 542, 138 Stat. 1201 and § 543, 138 Stat. 1202.

[62] Ensuring Safe Accommodations for Air Travelers With Disabilities Using Wheelchairs, 89 Fed. Reg. 102938 (Dec. 17, 2024) (to be codified at 14 C.F.R. pt. 382).

[63] FAA, BUDGET ESTIMATES FISCAL YEAR 2025 88 (2024), *available at* https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2024-03/FAA__FY__2025__Budget__Request__508-v5.pdf.

[64] FAA, *Air Traffic by the Numbers* (Sept. 9, 2024), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/air__traffic/by__the__numbers.

[65] FAA, *Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen)* (last updated Jan. 14, 2025), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/nextgen.

[66] *Id.*

[67] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–17–241R, NEXT GENERATION AIR TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM: INFORMATION ON EXPENDITURES, SCHEDULE AND COST ESTIMATES, FISCAL YEARS 2004–2030 (2016).

[68] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–24–107001, AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL: FAA ACTIONS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED TO MODERNIZE AGING SYSTEMS (Sept. 2024).

[69] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–17–450, AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL MODERNIZATION: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING NEXTGEN (2017).

In recognition of the ongoing challenges and delays of the NextGen program, section 206 instructs the FAA to operationalize the programs under NextGen by the end of 2025 and then sunset the Office of NextGen.[70] If the FAA does not operationalize such key NextGen programs by the deadline stated, section 206 transfers the duties, activities, and personnel of the office to the new Airspace Modernization Office created in section 207 of FAARA 2024, the ATO, the Office of Aviation Safety, and other appropriate offices of the Administration.[71] The FAA expects to meet the statutory deadline under this section.[72]

Furthermore, section 619 of FAARA 2024 requires the FAA to expedite the implementation of the following programs and capabilities previously under the NextGen brand: Performance Based Navigation (PBN), Data Communications, Terminal Flight Data Manager (TFDM) and Aeronautical Information Management.[73] This requirement includes deadlines for each program and the FAA must notify Congress regarding any failure to meet them.[74] Furthermore, the FAA is directed to task the NextGen Advisory Committee with providing recommendations on ways to expedite, prioritize, and fully implement NextGen programs to realize the operational benefits.[75] To date, FAA has not provided an update on implementation of these provisions.

Aging ATC Infrastructure

Much of the FAA's air traffic infrastructure is several decades old, which decreases efficiency and jeopardizes the reliability of critical navigation and surveillance services provided to aircraft operating in the NAS. The challenges with the FAA's efforts to swiftly modernize ATC programs remain a serious concern for the Committee and pose a critical risk to the safety of the NAS if left unaddressed. FAARA 2024 set the foundation to expedite the modernization of the FAA's legacy ATC system by requiring the agency to develop a plan to accelerate the replacement of any legacy system identified as outdated, insufficient, unsafe, or unstable.[76] It also directs the FAA to develop a list of unfunded facility and equipment needs that were not included in the President's budget.[77]

AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Each year, hundreds of millions of passengers pass through our Nation's airports. Regardless of size, airports connect our communities and drive economic development across major cities and rural towns alike. The FAA estimates there are approximately 14,400 private and 5,000 public-use airports, heliports, and seaplane bases in the United States.[78] FAARA 2024 contains a robust airport title that prioritizes funding for airport infrastructure, including increasing investments for small and general aviation airports, streamlined processes to expedite project deliveries, and provided new funding and programs to strengthen airport safety.[79]

Airport Improvement Program (AIP) Modifications and Funding

FAARA 2024 made a significant number of revisions to the AIP's apportionment formulas, discretionary categories, and project eligibilities. For example, the law increases the AIP minimum primary apportionment from $1 million to $1.3 million and increased the non-primary airport apportionment from 20 percent of total funding to 25 percent. Additionally, the law reduces the amount of AIP funding that medium and large hub airports were required to turn back in exchange for imposing a passenger facility charge from 75 percent to 60 percent.[80] To account for the legislative changes to the AIP, the FAA has traditionally issued program guidance letters that provide airports with direction on how the bill will be implemented. Section 733 of FAARA 2024 requires the FAA to issue program guidance letters accounting for all changes made to the AIP within one year of the date of enactment

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[70] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 206, 138 Stat. 1044.
[71] *Id.*
[72] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *2024 FAA Reauthorization Hill Update* (Oct. 8, 2024) (slides on file with Comm.).
[73] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 619, 138 Stat. 1231.
[74] *Id.*
[75] *Id.*
[76] *Id.* at § 622, 138 Stat. 1237.
[77] *Id.* at § 213.
[78] FAA, *Airport Categories* (last updated Dec. 7, 2022), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/airports/planning_capacity/categories.
[79] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10, 138 Stat. 1245.
[80] *Id.*

of the Act.[81] While the FAA has issued eight letters so far, they do not comprehensively explain the implementation of all AIP-related provisions in FAARA 2024.[82]

Environmental Programs and Streamlining

FAARA 2024 contains provisions intended to streamline environmental review of airport projects, expand low-emission airport technologies and mitigate the effects of aircraft noise on communities near airports. Section 782 streamlines and expands the Voluntary Airport Low Emission (VALE) program to airports in non-attainment areas.[83] Section 783 significantly revised existing streamlining environmental procedures for certain important categories of airport projects, while section 788 establishes a new categorical exclusion for airport projects receiving less than $6 million in Federal funding.[84] While the FAA has promulgated field guidance for these provisions, it has not indicated a timeline for revision FAA Order 1050.1F, which governs the FAA's procedures for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act.[85]

Sections 786 and 792 of FAARA 2024 direct the Administrator to update the FAA's noise standards and establish an Aircraft Noise Advisory Committee to advise the FAA on the effects of aircraft noise exposure and FAA noise policies, respectively.[86] The FAA has not completed the process of updating its noise standards. A charter for the advisory committee was issued on January 14, 2025.[87] To date, no members of the advisory committee have been appointed, and no initial meeting has been scheduled.

REVITALIZING GENERAL AVIATION

General aviation (GA) is commonly referred to as the backbone of the aviation system as it underpins the aviation industry and is an important part of our National economy. According to a 2025 study, GA supported more than 1.3 million jobs and generated $339 billion in total output, a sizeable increase from the previous iteration of the study conducted in 2018. As new entrants, such as powered-lift aircraft, begin to integrate in the NAS, GA's global economic output is projected to continue to grow.[88] Given GA's importance to the aviation ecosystem, FAARA 2024 includes the first-ever GA title focused on revitalizing the GA community and improving the services FAA provides to general aviators.

Expanding BasicMed

In 2016, Congress established BasicMed, a medical qualification that allows private pilots to be approved by a state-licensed physician to exercise flying privileges in lieu of receiving a third-class medical certificate.[89] Section 828 expands the application of BasicMed by amending the rules that govern pilots operating under a BasicMed credential. Specifically, it expands the pool of eligible aircraft by increasing the number of allowable passengers from five to six, increasing the number of occupants from six to seven, and increasing the maximum takeoff weight from 6,000 pounds to 12,500 pounds, while excluding certain transport category rotorcraft.[90] Additionally, section 815 allows Designated Pilot Examiners (DPEs) administering proficiency checks or tests to airman to be able to do so under BasicMed so long as the aircraft the flight test is being conducted in is eligible for purposes of a BasicMed operation.[91] The FAA issued a final rule updating parts 61 and 68, of Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations, on November 15, 2024, updating BasicMed

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[81] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 733, 138 Stat. 1273.

[82] FAA, *Program Guidance Letters (PGLs) and Program Information Memorandums (PIMs) for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP)*, (last updated Friday, May 23, 2025), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/airports/aip/guidance_letters#r-pgls.

[83] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 782, 138 Stat. 1302.

[84] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 783, 138 Stat. 1302; FAARA 2024, *supra* note 9 at § 788, 138 Stat. 1314.

[85] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *Discussion on Airport Provisions* (Apr. 24, 2025, 3:00pm EST) (Slides on file with Comm.).

[86] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 786 and 792, 138 Stat. 1316.

[87] FAA, CHARTER OF THE AIRCRAFT NOISE ADVISORY COMMITTEE (2025), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/regulationspolicies/rulemaking/committees/aircraft-noise-advisory-committee/charter.pdf.

[88] Press Release, NATIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION ASSOCIATION, *General Aviation Provides Robust Contribution to US Economy* (Feb. 19, 2025), *available at* https://nbaa.org/2025-press-releases/general-aviation-provides-robust-contribution-to-u-s-economy/.

[89] FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016, Pub. L. No. 114–190, 130 Stat. 641.

[90] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 828, 138 Stat. 1336.

[91] *Id.* at § 815, 138 Stat. 1328.

regulations to reflect the changes made by sections 828 and 815.[92] Additionally, the Agency remains on track to brief Congress on changes to small aircraft activity and safety incidents by the 2028 due date.[93]

Flight Examinations

Several GA operators and flight schools assert there is a Nationwide shortage of DPEs necessary to meet the needs of student pilots and pilots seeking additional certifications and ratings.[94] Section 833 requires the FAA to establish an office to provide oversight and facilitate national coordination of DPEs. It is expected that the FAA is in the process of setting up an office to focus on DPE oversight as well as working towards fulfilling the reporting requirement found in FAARA 2024.

Part 135 Air Carrier Certificate Backlog

Following the COVID–19 pandemic, the FAA faced a significant backlog of several services, including certification of new applicants.[95] The backlog resulted in the potential for applicants having to wait two or even three years for FAA to initiate a certification process.[96] Section 818 requires the FAA to reduce the backlog of air carrier certificate applications under Part 135 of Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations.[97] Specifically, the FAA must set a goal to maintain an average certificate processing time of less than 60 days within one year of enactment and a goal to maintain an average of less than 30 days processing time within two years of enactment.[98] As of April 15, 2025, the average acceptance and rejection timeframe for all part 135 applications is 31 days.[99]

HARNESSING ADVANCED AVIATION

The FAA has the responsibility to certify, oversee, and regulate the safety and operations of the civil aviation sector, including integrating new entrants like Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) aircraft into the NAS.[100] Title IX of FAARA 2024 incorporates provisions to foster the safe, efficient, and timely integration of new entrant technologies into the NAS. UAS, also known as drones, and electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) powered-lift aircraft, commonly referred to as AAM vehicles or air taxis, have the potential to change the way we travel and transport goods. FAARA 2024 ensures that the FAA is properly positioned to support the safe integration of these new entrant technologies into the NAS while supporting American innovation.

Beyond Visual Line of Sight Drone Operations

UAS operating beyond a remote pilot's visual line of sight (commonly referred to as BVLOS) presents unique challenges to the FAA's existing regulatory framework.[101] While the FAA has made some progress in approving BVLOS operations over the past several years, the Agency has faced challenges in promulgating regulations to allow greater BVLOS operations. Section 930 of FAARA 2024 directs the FAA to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) establishing a performance-based regulatory pathway for UAS to operate BVLOS by September 16, 2024, however, the Agency has yet to comply with the law. This critical rule, issued in a timely manner, will provide regulatory stability and certainty for the UAS industry.[102] During the Biden Administration, a proposed rule made it through the regulatory review process and to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for final ap-

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[92] Regulatory Updates to Basic Med; Correction, 89 Fed. Reg. 105446 (Dec. 27, 2024) (to be codified at 14 C.F.R. pt. 61).

[93] Hill Update *supra* note 14.

[94] Janice Wood, *How much did you pay for your check ride?*, GENERAL AVIATION NEWS, (Oct. 31, 2022), *available at* https://generalaviationnews.com/2022/10/31/how-much-did-you-pay-for-your-check-ride/.

[95] Kerry Lynch, *FAA Cutting Lengthy Backlogs for Registration, Certification*, AVIATION INT'L NEWS, (June 22, 2023), *available at* https://www.ainonline.com/aviation-news/business-aviation/2023-06-22/faa-cutting-lengthy-backlogs-registration-certification.

[96] *Id.*

[97] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 818, 138 Stat. 1328.

[98] *Id.*

[99] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118–63); Section 818(c) Part 135 Air Carrier Certificate Backlog* (May 2, 2025, 12:00pm EST) (Slides on file with Comm.).

[100] 49 U.S.C. § 106(f)(3).

[101] FAA AVIATION RULEMAKING COMM., UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS BEYOND VISUAL LINE OF SIGHT, FINAL REPORT at 8, (Mar. 10, 2022), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/rulemaking/committees/documents/media/UAS_BVLOS_ARC_FINAL_REPORT_03102022.pdf.

[102] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 930, 138 Stat. 1366.

proval, however, it was not cleared before the change in Administration. In February of 2025, the proposed BVLOS rule was resubmitted for Executive-level review under the Trump Administration, and the Agency expects the proposed rule to be published Summer 2025; still long after the required timeline under FAARA 2024.[103] On May 14, 2025, Secretary Duffy announced that the proposed BVLOS rule was submitted to the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) for final approval. Following final approval, the proposed rule will be published in the Federal Register and open to public comments.[104] The FAA is planning for the issuance the final BVLOS rule in March of 2027.[105]

Environmental Review and Noise Certification

As UAS regulations continue to mature, the commercial use-case for these technologies will exponentially grow. Section 909 of FAARA 2024 directs the FAA to publish UAS specific environmental review guidance and implementation procedures. Additionally, the FAA is directed to engage with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) to identify actions eligible for a new categorical exclusion to more easily allow for safe commercial operations of UAS.[106] The FAA briefed the Committee on August 13, 2024, in line with the 90-day statutory requirement, and anticipates meeting all the deadlines of this section.[107]

Powered-Lift Operations for AAM Aircraft

Currently, several AAM aircraft manufacturers are in the process of certifying the design of their aircraft with FAA and plan to enter service upon this certification. AAM aircraft operators expected to use existing operating procedures for traditional aircraft, the FAA has faced challenges in leveraging existing aviation rules for a new class of aircraft. To meet entry into service target dates for AAM manufacturers and operators, and to establish a clear regulatory safety framework for powered-lift aircraft, in 2023, the FAA declared that it would publish a final Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) for AAM aircraft by "the fourth quarter of 2024."[108] Section 955 of the FAARA 2024 required the FAA to publish a final Powered-Lift SFAR no later than November 16, 2024, the FAA accomplished the task a month early, announcing the final SFAR on October 22, 2024.[109]

Electric Aircraft Infrastructure Pilot Program

Some AAM operators will leverage existing aviation infrastructure, such as airports and heliports, while others may require new facilities, such as vertiports, to accommodate growing operations.[110] Section 745 establishes a five-year pilot program allowing up to ten eligible airports to acquire, install, and operate equipment to support the operations of AAM vehicles and to construct or modify related infrastructure to support such equipment.[111] On May 12, 2025, FAA issued a program guidance letter (PGL) for this pilot program to provide information on how airports may prepare for participation; however, it does not include a timeline for applications.[112]

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[103] Briefing from FAA, DHS, & DOJ to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *House of Representatives Spring 2025 Semi-annual 6 U.S.C. 124n C–UAS briefing* (Apr. 3, 2025, 10:00am EST) (Notes on file with Comm.). [hereinafter 124n C–UAS Briefing].

[104] Press Release, DEP'T OF TRANSP., *Trump's Transportation Secretary Sean P. Duffy Announces Progress on Key Drone Rules as Part of His Innovation Agenda* (May 14, 2025), *available at* https://www.transportation.gov/briefing-room/trumps-transportation-secretary-sean-p-duffy-announces-progress-key-drone-rules-part.

[105] 124n C–UAS Briefing, *supra* note 94.

[106] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 909, 138 Stat. 1344.

[107] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118–63): Section 909 Environmental Review and Noise Certification Briefing* (Aug. 13, 2024, 2:00pm EST) (Slides on file with Comm.).

[108] Revise Airplane Definition to Incorporate Powered-lift Operations, RIN 2120–AL72, Unified Agenda, Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs; *FAA Reauthorization: Enhancing America's Gold Standard in Aviation Safety, Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Aviation of the H. Comm. on Transp. and Infrastructure*, 118th Cong. (Feb. 7, 2023) (statement of David Boulter, Acting Assoc. Admin. for Aviation Safety, FAA).

[109] Press Release, FAA, *With New Rule, FAA is Ready for Air Travel of the Future*, (Oct. 22, 2024) *available at* https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/new-rule-faa-ready-air-travel-future.

[110] FAA, ADVANCED AIR MOBILITY INFRASTRUCTURE, (Oct. 15, 2024), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/airports/new_entrants/aam_infrastructure.

[111] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 745, 138 Stat. 1202.

[112] FAA, *Reauthorization Program Guidance Letter (R–PGL) 25–06: Planning and Project Eligibility*, (May 12, 2025), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/airports/aip/guidance_letters/R-PGL-25-06-Planning-Project-Eligibility#:~:text=This%20Reauthorization%20Program%20Guidance%20Letter,eligibility%20for%20various%20project%20costs.

IV. WITNESSES

- Mr. Darren Pleasance, President and Chief Executive Officer, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association
- Mr. Edward M. Bolen, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Business Aviation Association
- Mr. Michael Robbins, President and Chief Executive Officer, Association of Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International
- Captain Jody Reven, President, Southwest Airlines Pilots Association
- Ms. Sara Nelson, International President, Association of Flight Attendants—CWG, AFL–CIO

Addendum to SSM for Aviation Subcommittee Hearing on "*FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024: Stakeholder Perspectives on Implementation One Year Later*"

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024—Completed & Notable In-Progress Provisions

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
Sec. 214 ...	Chief Technology Officer	Complete	Effective as of September 26, 2024.
Sec. 215 ...	Definition of Air Traffic Control System	Complete	Effective as of November 13, 2024.
Sec. 219 ...	Authority to Use Electronic Services	Complete	Effective as of July 1, 2024.
Sec. 224 ...	FAA Participation in Industry Standards Organizations.	Complete	Effective as of March 4, 2024.
Sec. 227 ...	Administrative Services Franchise Fund	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 229 ...	Advanced Aviation Technology and Innovation Steering Committee.	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 301 ...	Helicopter Air Ambulance Operations	Complete	Briefing held December 17, 2024.
Sec. 304 ...	Training of organization delegation authority unit members.	In Progress ..	FAA is finalizing a notice that will require ODA holders to have a recurrent training program.
Sec. 305 ...	Clarification on safety management system information disclosure.	Complete	Effective as of May 16, 2024.
Sec. 308 ...	Scalability of Safety Management Systems.	Complete	Effective as of July 11, 2024.
Sec. 309 ...	Review Final Safety Management System Rule.	Complete	Effective as of June 25, 2024.
Sec. 325 ...	National Simulator Program Policies and Guidance.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 310 ...	Improvement of certification process	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 314 ...	Risk Model for Production Facility Inspections.	In Progress ..	FAA will brief Congress no later than July 2025.
Sec. 315 ...	Review of FAA Use of Aviation Safety Data.	In Progress ..	Contract officially awarded to a third-party vendor in February 2025.
Sec. 323 ...	Study on impacts of temperature in aircraft cabins.	In Progress ..	National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine is working to comply with this requirement.
Sec. 328 ...	Restricted Category Aircraft Maintenance and Operations.	Complete	Effective as of May 16, 2024.

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024—Completed & Notable In-Progress Provisions—Continued

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
Sec. 331 ...	Update of FAA Standards to Allow Distribution and Use of Certain Restricted Routes and Terminal Procedures.	Complete	Effective as of July 15, 2024.
Sec. 337 ...	Flight Service Stations	Complete	Effective as of October 11, 2024.
Sec. 340 ...	Study on FAA Use of Mandatory Equal Access to Justice Act Waivers.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 342 ...	Don Young Alaska Aviation Safety Initiative.	In Progress ..	Annual Report Submitted to CST and T&I on May 16, 2025.
Sec. 344 ...	Changed Product Rule Reform	In Progress ..	Changed Product Rule ARC launched in June 2024, and a report was provided to the Administrator in December 2024 which is currently in FAA review.
Sec. 345 ...	Administrative authority for civil penalties.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 347 ...	Zero Tolerance for Near-Misses, Runway Incursions and Surface Safety Risks.	In Progress ..	FAA remains on track with required deadlines.
Sec. 348 ...	Improvements to Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing Program.	In Progress ..	ASIAS program will soon begin implementation of a new advanced technology tool to more rapidly process safety data and produce safety intelligence.
Sec. 350 ...	Secondary Cockpit Barriers	In Progress ..	FAA is on track to submit the report in July 2025.
Sec. 355 ...	Tower Marking Notice of Proposed Rulemaking.	Complete	FAA issued notice to implement section 2110 of the FAA Extension, Safety and Security Act of 2016; Effective as of November 18, 2024.
Sec. 356 ...	Promotion of Civil Aeronautics and Safety of Air Commerce.	Complete	Effective as of July 10, 2024.
Sec. 357 ...	Educational and Professional Development.	Complete	Effective as of September 27, 2024.
Sec. 359 ...	Availability of Personnel for Inspections, Site Visits, and Training.	Complete	Effective as of February 5, 2025.
Sec. 366 ...	25-Hour Cockpit Voice Recorder	In Progress ..	Draft rule is currently in the regulatory review process.
Sec. 372 ...	Enhanced Qualification Program for Restricted Airline Transport Pilot Certificate.	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 391 ...	Findings	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 392 ...	Aerospace Product Safety	Complete	Effective as of August 28, 2024.
Sec. 393 ...	Federal Aviation Administration regulations, policy and guidance.	Complete	Effective as of February 13, 2024.
Sec. 396 ...	GAO Report on Cybersecurity of Commercial Aviation Avionics.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 401 ...	Repeal of duplicative or obsolete workforce programs.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024—Completed & Notable In-Progress Provisions—Continued

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
Sec. 403 ...	Bessie Coleman Women in Aviation Advisory Committee.	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 407 ...	Airman's Medical Bill of Rights	Complete	Effective as of January 28, 2025.
Sec. 408 ...	Improved Designee Misconduct Reporting Process.	Complete	Effective as of February 26, 2025.
Sec. 411 ...	Aeromedical Innovation and Modernization Working Group.	In Progress ..	FAA formed the workgroup in November 2024, and its report is due in November 2025.
Sec. 414 ...	Study of High School Aviation Maintenance Training Programs.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 416 ...	Air Traffic Controller Instructor Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention.	In Progress ..	MITRE study is complete, and the FAA is developing the implementation plan.
Sec. 421 ...	Crewmember Pumping Guidance	Complete	Effective as of January 16, 2025.
Sec. 422 ...	GAO Study and Report on Extent and Effects of Commercial Aviation Pilot Shortage on Regional/Commuter Carriers.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 425 ...	Joint aviation employment training working group.	Delayed	FAA is finalizing the charter and then will move to membership solicitation.
Sec. 428 ...	Direct hire authority utilization	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 432 ...	Deterring crewmember interference	In Progress.	
Sec. 433 ...	Use of Biographical Assessments	Complete	Effective as of September 20, 2024.
Sec. 434 ...	Employee Assault Prevention and Response Plan Standards and Best Practices.	Complete	Effective as of September 27, 2024.
Sec. 437 ...	Air Traffic Control Workforce Staffing	Delayed	FAA does not anticipate Transportation Research Board will submit their report to FAA & Congress until summer 2025.
Sec. 438 ...	Airport Service Workforce Analysis	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 439 ...	Federal Aviation Administration Academy and Facility Expansion Plan.	In Progress ..	Plan submitted to CST and T&I on May 16, 2025.
Sec. 440 ...	Improving Federal Aviation Workforce Development Programs.	In Progress ..	FAA released the Notice of Funding Opportunity in January 2025 for the pilot and maintenance technician grants, but has not yet established the manufacturing workforce grant.
Sec. 514 ...	GAO Study on Competition and Consolidation in the Air Carrier Industry.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 515 ...	GAO Study and Report on the Operational Preparedness of Air Carriers for Certain Events.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 519 ...	Seat Dimensions	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 608 ...	Consideration of Small Hub Control Towers.	Complete	Effective as of July 26, 2024.

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024—Completed & Notable In-Progress Provisions—Continued

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
Sec. 612 ...	Briefing on Radio Communications Coverage Around Mountainous Terrain.	Complete	Briefing on December 18, 2024.
Sec. 616 ...	Briefing on LIT VORTAC Project	Complete	Briefing on December 18, 2025.
Sec. 619 ...	NextGen programs	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadlines in this section.
Sec. 620 ...	Contract tower program	In Progress ..	FAA is finalizing the technical requirements for approved controller situational awareness tools.
Sec. 622 ...	Audit of legacy systems	In Progress ..	FAA entered into agreement with MITRE and plans to have the report within 15 months of enactment.
Sec. 628 ...	Required Consultation with National Parks Overflights Advisory Group.	Complete	Effective as of February 3, 2025.
Sec. 631 ...	Update to FAA Order on Airway Planning Standard.	Complete	Effective as of December 19, 2024.
Sec. 704 ...	Extension of competitive access report requirement.	Complete	Effective as of May 16, 2024.
Sec. 715 ...	Special carryover assumption rule	Complete	Effective as of March 6, 2025.
Sec. 717 ...	Revision of discretionary categories	Complete	Effective as of April 4, 2025.
Sec. 722 ...	Long-term management plans	Complete	Effective as of April 4, 2025.
Sec. 726 ...	General aviation airport runway extension pilot program.	Complete	Report submitted to CST and T&I, Effective as of April 4, 2025.
Sec. 732 ...	Populous counties without airports	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 736 ...	Transportation Demand Management at Airports.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 739 ...	Reclassification of unclassified relievers	Complete	Effective as of September 30, 2024.
Sec. 742 ...	Increasing Energy Efficiency of Airports and Meeting Current and Future Energy Power Demands.	In Progress ..	FAA intends to meet the requirements of this section by May 16, 2025.
Sec. 743 ...	Review of Airport Layout Plans	Complete	Effective as of October 3, 2024.
Sec. 747 ...	Notice of funding opportunity	Complete	Effective as of September 30, 2025.
Sec. 749 ...	Airport Diagram Terminology	Complete	Effective as of July 30, 2024.
Sec. 751 ...	Minority and disadvantaged business participation.	Complete	Effective as of September 26, 2024.
Sec. 755 ...	GAO Study on Transit Access	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 760 ...	Washington, DC Metropolitan Area Special Flight Rules Area.	Complete	Report submitted to CST and T&I, Effective as of May 16, 2025.
Sec. 761 ...	Study on Air Cargo Operations in Puerto Rico.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 762 ...	Progress Reports on the National Transition Plan Related to a Flourine-Free Firefighting Foam.	In Progress ..	FAA continues to provide required progress reports.

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024—Completed & Notable In-Progress Provisions—Continued

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
Sec. 767 ...	PFAS-Related Resources for Airports	In Progress ..	FAA stood up the implementation team and is preparing to launch the program after receiving appropriations.
Sec. 773 ...	Homestead Joint Use	Complete	Effective as of September 13, 2024.
Sec. 774B	Study on Improvements for Certain Nonhub Airports.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 782 ...	Repeal of burdensome emissions credit requirements.	Complete	Effective as of April 4, 2025.
Sec. 784 ...	Subchapter III definitions	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 785 ...	Pilot program extension	Complete	Effective as of April 4, 2025.
Sec. 788 ...	Categorical exclusions	Complete	Effective as of December 19, 2024.
Sec. 790 ...	Recommendations on Reducing Rotorcraft Noise in District of Columbia.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
Sec. 809 ...	Ensuring Safe Landings During Off-Airport Operations.	Complete	Effective as of September 24, 2024.
Sec. 813 ...	Temporary Airman Certificates	Complete	Effective as of September 24, 2024.
Sec. 814 ...	Letter of Deviation Authority	Complete	FAA issued an Advisory Circular, Effective October 2, 2024.
Sec. 815 ...	BasicMed For Examiners Administering Tests or Proficiency Checks.	Complete	Regulatory updates to BasicMed effective as of November 18, 2024.
Sec. 817 ...	Deadline to Eliminate Aircraft Registration Backlog.	Complete	Effective as of May 9, 2024.
Sec. 820 ...	Flight Instructor Certificates	Complete	Removed expiration date on flight certificate. Effective as of October 1, 2024.
Sec. 822 ...	Application of policies, orders and guidance.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 825 ...	Exclusion of gyroplanes from fuel system requirements.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 826 ...	Public aircraft flight time logging eligibility.	Complete	Completed October 2, 2024.
Sec. 828 ...	Expansion of Basic Med	Complete	FAA promulgated rules to enact changes to Basic Med in November 2024. FAA remains on track to brief Congress in 2028.
Sec. 830 ...	Charitable Flight Fuel Reimbursement Exemptions.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 902 ...	Unmanned Aircraft in the Arctic	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 903 ...	Small UAS Safety Standards Technical Corrections.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 904 ...	Airport Safety and Airspace Hazard Mitigation and Enforcement.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 906 ...	Electronic Conspicuity Study	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.

FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024—Completed & Notable In-Progress Provisions—Continued

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
Sec. 912 ...	Drone infrastructure inspection grant program.	Delayed	DOT has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 915 ...	Termination of the Advanced Aviation Advisory Committee.	Complete	Meetings cancellation notice published in Federal Register on May 30, 2024.
Sec. 916 ...	Unmanned and Autonomous Flight Advisory Committee.	In Progress ..	FAA is finalizing the charter and then will move to membership solicitation.
Sec. 922 ...	Extension of Know Before You Fly Campaign.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 923 ...	Public aircraft definition	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 926 ...	Public Safety Use of Tethered UAS	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 927 ...	Extending Special Authority for Certain Unmanned Aircraft Systems.	In Progress ..	FAA is on track to develop related guidance for UAS operators by summer 2025.
Sec. 929 ...	Applications for Designation	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 930 ...	Beyond Visual Line of Sight Operations for Unmanned Aircraft Systems.	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 931 ...	Acceptable Levels of Risk and Risk Assessment Methodology.	Complete	Methodology published in September 2024.
Sec. 935 ...	Protection of Public Gatherings	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 955 ...	Rules for Operation of Powered-Lift Aircraft.	Complete	FAA published SFAR in October 2024.
Sec. 961 ...	Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies (CAAT).	Complete	FAA announced on April 23, 2025 that Texas A&M will be managing the CAAT.
Sec. 1004	National aviation research plan modification.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 1005	Advanced Materials Center of Excellence enhancements.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 1006	Center of Excellence for Unmanned Aircraft Systems.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 1013	Contract Weather Observers program	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 1018	Next Generation Radio Altimeters	Delayed	FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline in this section.
Sec. 1017	Center of Excellence for Alternative Jet Fuels and Environment.	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 1106	Prohibition on mandates	Complete	Effective upon Enactment.
Sec. 1107	COVID–19 vaccination status	Complete	Effective upon Enactment

FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2024: STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES ON IMPLEMENTATION ONE YEAR LATER

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4, 2025

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

The subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 10:05 a.m., in Room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Troy E. Nehls (Chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Mr. NEHLS. The Subcommittee on Aviation will come to order.

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

Without objection, so ordered.

And as a reminder, if Members wish to insert a document into the record, please email it to DocumentsTI@mail.house.gov.

I will now recognize myself for an opening statement for 5 minutes.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. TROY E. NEHLS OF TEXAS, CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION

Mr. NEHLS. May 16, 2025, marked the 1-year anniversary of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 being signed into law—a great, great legislation. Crafting this legislation was a monumental task that took place over the course of 2 years and involved over 2,100 stakeholder and Member requests.

Thanks to the leadership of Chairman Graves, the largest and most comprehensive FAA Reauthorization Act was signed into law. This legislation touched every major sector of the aviation industry and included provisions to ensure that the United States remains the global leader in aviation.

Specifically, the law maintains aviation safety as the FAA's number-one priority, as it should; contains the first-ever general aviation title to strengthen America's general aviation sector; addresses workforce development challenges for qualified workers, including pilots, mechanics, and air traffic controllers; invests in our country's airport infrastructure by expediting project deliveries and prioritizing investments for small and general aviation airports; en-

sures the safe and efficient integration of new technologies, such as drones and advanced air mobility; and provides necessary reforms to enhance the passenger experience for the traveling public.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 included over 500 mandates for the FAA and the Department of Transportation to implement over the course of 5 years. I am eager to hear from our witnesses today about the progress that has or has not been made in implementing the law.

Today, we have representatives from a broad cross-section of aviation stakeholders, including general aviation, new entrants, and commercial airlines. It is critical that we hear from all of them as we work to ensure that this law is implemented as Congress intended.

I want to acknowledge upfront that implementing a law of this scale, it is no small task. It requires coordination, persistence, and a unified effort across Government and industry.

That said, history tells us that the relevant agencies have often struggled; they have struggled to meet such a challenge. In fact, numerous provisions of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 and even some policy directives from the 2016 FAA extension have yet to be implemented to this day, and, quite honestly, that is unacceptable.

While the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 was comprehensive, ambitious, and challenging, it set an achievable timeline for implementation and reform.

Our reputation as a world leader in aviation is on the line, but I am extremely confident that the Trump administration, they will get it right. I look forward to partnering with both President Trump and Secretary Duffy to protect and maintain that hard-earned reputation.

And while progress has been made on the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, several important provisions have been delayed, such as: section 372, the establishment of an enhanced qualification program for restricted airline transport pilot, ATP, certificates that utilizes best-in-class simulator technology to ensure that we have the best trained and safest pilots in the world; section 930, a rulemaking that will allow for scaled, safe, beyond visual line of sight operations for unmanned aircraft systems in United States airspace; and section 1110, a report that provides an update on the creation of Federal and international policies that would establish the United States as the global leader in civil supersonic aircraft.

It is essential that this subcommittee, along with the broader aviation community, hold the DOT and FAA accountable to achieve the goals set forth in our legislation.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here today. I look forward to working with each one of you to ensure this pivotal law gets implemented on time and as intended.

[Mr. Nehls' prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Troy E. Nehls of Texas, Chairman, Subcommittee on Aviation

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Mr. NEHLS. I now recognize Ranking Member Cohen for 5 minutes for an opening.

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

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

A little over a year ago, we passed the bipartisan FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. It was a big, beautiful bill. It was landmark legislation to strengthen every facet of our aviation ecosystem.

We met with all of the groups involved, the private sector, and we incorporated your suggestions, and we got it all in there. There

were a few things that were open for quite a few years that were all included. Eighty provisions specifically aimed at improving aviation safety in the U.S., while other provisions will advance innovation and build upon the strength of our U.S. aviation economy.

But laws and words do not save lives. It is the timely and accountable implementation that is so important. And, today, sadly, the stakes are higher than ever. The tragic collision over the Potomac earlier this year really brought it to our attention. The disturbing rise in near-misses has exposed additional serious vulnerabilities in the system. They are stark reminders that work to modernize and secure our aviation infrastructure cannot wait, and we must remain vigilant in the existing law's execution as well as be on the lookout for solutions to new problems.

One of our most urgent needs today is to modernize our air traffic control system. FAA data and recent assessments show that too many of our systems are outdated, and the controller staffing shortages are stretching an already strained workforce, increasing operational risk.

And our previous administration tried to bring $8 billion in to work on that. The timing didn't work and the coordination with the Senate didn't work, but they saw the problem and had that $8 billion request to start upgrading—continue upgrading—they had already started with $1 billion a year—the air traffic control system.

Nowhere has this been clearer than Newark Airport, where ATC equipment failures and staffing challenges have disrupted operations and raised safety concerns. Apparently, United says that they have the best on-schedule performance of any airports in the New York metropolitan area recently and they have the runway completed and things should be fine in Newark. Let's hope so.

Congress gave the FAA clear directives through the 2024 reauthorization to modernize critical infrastructure, expedite deployment of new technologies, and hire and train the next generation of air traffic controllers. This was not a suggestion, it was a mandate, and we need to see results.

The Chair puts on an appearance, a facade, of being a nice, friendly, easygoing guy. He's not. He wants this done and done now. He will be on your case if you don't do it.

At the same time, we must ensure that the FAA keeps pace with emerging technologies like advanced air mobility, drones, and autonomous systems. The 2024 reauthorization laid the groundwork, but delays in regulatory action risk ceding America's leadership in aviation innovation to global competitors. We cannot afford to fall behind.

Equally important is growing our aviation workforce. From pilots and mechanics to controllers and flight attendants, the aviation sector depends on a highly trained, highly skilled workforce. For this reason, Congress included numerous reforms and new programs in the FAA law to help recruit and develop the next generation of aviation professionals and keep them safe. Too many violent attacks on flight attendants and in the airplanes. It needs to stop, and hopefully that will—we will find out where we stand with that.

Unfortunately, the administration has moved swiftly in the wrong direction, downsizing and terminating the very people and technical expertise responsible for the law's implementation. How

much of this was the new transportation/FAA administration? How much of it was DOGE and Mr. Musk? And maybe it was a bad day; maybe his drugs weren't balanced or something. But they eliminated a lot of people we needed, and that is one of the problems we have.

It is critical that the FAA reverse this ill-conceived course and move quickly to implement the carefully constructed provisions of the law.

I look forward to working with Chair Nehls and our committee leaders Graves and Larsen to begin developing a bipartisan ATC modernization package that ensures our aviation system is the safest, innovative, and is the most resilient in the world.

I appreciate the witnesses for joining us today. I look forward to hearing your perspectives on progress made and challenges that remain as we continue our oversight of the FAA.

I yield back.

[Mr. Cohen's prepared statement follows:]

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

Thank you, Chairman Nehls.

A little over one year ago, we passed the bipartisan FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024—a landmark law we designed to strengthen every facet of our aviation ecosystem.

This law includes nearly 80 provisions specifically aimed at improving aviation safety in the U.S., while other provisions will advance innovation and build upon the strength of the U.S. aviation economy.

But laws and words alone do not save lives. They require timely and accountable implementation.

And today, sadly, the stakes are higher than ever.

The tragic collision over the Potomac earlier this year and a disturbing rise in near-misses have exposed additional serious vulnerabilities in our system.

These are stark reminders that our work to modernize and secure our aviation infrastructure cannot wait—and that we must remain vigilant in the existing law's execution, as well as be on the lookout for solutions to new problems.

One of our most urgent needs today is to modernize our air traffic control system.

FAA data and recent assessments show that too many of our systems are outdated, and that controller staffing shortages are stretching an already strained workforce, increasing operational risk.

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Unfortunately, the Administration has moved swiftly in the wrong direction, downsizing and terminating the very people and technical expertise responsible for the law's implementation. It is critical that the FAA reverse this ill-conceived course, and move quickly to implement the carefully constructed provisions of the law.

I look forward to working with Chairman Nehls and our committee leaders—Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen—to begin developing a bipartisan ATC modernization package that ensures our aviation system is the safest, innovative and most resilient in the world.

I appreciate the witnesses for joining us today and look forward to hearing their perspectives on the progress made and the challenges that remain as we continue our oversight of FAA implementation.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, Steve, for your kind words.

I would like to now welcome our witnesses and thank them for being here today. Thank you all.

I will take a moment to explain our lighting system. Three lights in front of you. Green, go, obviously. Yellow, you are running out of time. And red, please wrap up your remarks.

I ask unanimous consent that the witnesses' full statement be included into the record.

Without objection, so ordered.

I also 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.

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

With that, Mr. Pleasance, you are recognized for the 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF DARREN PLEASANCE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION; EDWARD M. BOLEN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION ASSOCIATION; MICHAEL ROBBINS, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ASSOCIATION FOR UNCREWED VEHICLE SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL; CAPTAIN JODY REVEN, PRESIDENT, SOUTHWEST AIRLINES PILOTS ASSOCIATION; AND SARA NELSON, INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS—CWA, AFL–CIO

TESTIMONY OF DARREN PLEASANCE, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, AIRCRAFT OWNERS AND PILOTS ASSOCIATION

Mr. PLEASANCE. Great. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, Ranking Member Cohen and the rest of the members of the committee.

I am Darren Pleasance. I am the president and CEO of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, or AOPA, and I am privileged and pleased to be here to provide testimony back on our view on how the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 is being implemented.

Just for level-setting, general aviation is essentially all aviation that is not military and not commercial aviation. So it is a very vibrant and diverse portion of our aviation ecosystem. There are over 5,000 public airports, 14,000 landing strips, heliports, and other

landing facilities that make up this important and critical part of our national infrastructure around the country.

I would like to commend, as the chairman said, full committee Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen and this broader committee for your great work last year, bipartisan work, in passing the FAA reauthorization bill of 2024. It was a landmark piece of legislation, as was alluded to a few moments ago.

A particularly important part of that was that it included a very specific call-out for general aviation that had never been a part of the bill in the past. And in there, there were specific policies and programs that directly benefit and enhance the vitality of general aviation in this country. And we feel very grateful for that, that work being done.

This hearing gives us the opportunity today to speak about what is happening with the implementation, but also follows nicely on the other work that is happening with President Trump and with Secretary Duffy on the work to modernize ATC. It wasn't a specific part of the bill, but it is an important part, as Ranking Member Cohen alluded to, to ensuring that we maintain preeminence in the world. So I look forward to being able to speak to that.

We also appreciate—I specifically appreciate this committee's work on creating a downpayment, let's call it, the $12½ billion funding, to help at least get the modernization effort going. So I appreciate that.

AOPA is a member of the Modern Skies Coalition, which is a group of many aviation organizations across the country who are stacking hands and aligning on the importance of ATC modernization. And we meet regularly, and we are fully behind the efforts of this committee to help take that from concept to reality.

We do currently—and I think this is important not to lose sight of—we have the safest aviation ecosystem in the world. It remains the safest in the world. That doesn't mean we can't be better. And so we feel strongly, as AOPA, in partnership with others up here, that we need to continue to work together to help make it even better into the future.

There are too many areas within the FAA Reauthorization Act for me to speak to all of them, so I thought I would just call out a few of them and provide perspective back on those.

One is around privacy. It is very important to pilots to be able to maintain privacy. And there was an aspect of the bill that required the FAA to put in place the means for pilots to withhold their personal information and separate it, in a sense, from the aircraft registry. That work has been done and was just recently implemented about a month and a half ago or so, so we feel pleased with that.

Conversely, though, we do still have concerns around the area of ADS–B. And that has unfortunately become a term that I suspect most of you know about because of the DC accident not that many months ago, where ADS–B is the technology that plays such a critical role in ensuring aircraft don't run into each other. And, increasingly, we are seeing that technology being used for things other than safety, whether it is collecting fees of some sort or frivolous lawsuits or other sorts of FAA enforcement action, which, in our view, goes counter to the primary premise of ADS–B, which

was safety. And anything that occurs that puts safety at risk or deters people from implementing this technology is concerning to us. So we think there is more work to do there.

BasicMed is an area this committee, years ago, partnered with AOPA and others in the industry to create an easier way for pilots to get their medical so they can fly. And this committee was able to create BasicMed in a way that allowed more than 90,000 pilots now to take advantage of that without any reduction in safety. The most recent FAA reauthorization bill enhanced that, and that has been implemented, so we are quite happy with where BasicMed has arrived today. Still more work to be done, in partnership with Canada and others, but we feel good about where that is.

Fee transparency is an area of concern. The GAO, as part of the authorization bill, was required to go out and basically ensure that the fixed-base operators around the country are, in fact, establishing transparency with their fees and pricing so that, as pilots use this national airspace infrastructure, we are able to ensure they have visibility into what those fees will be. We would like to partner with the GAO to help them do that. We get calls almost every day on this topic, and we are concerned about some of the egregious fees we are starting to see at specific airports.

One other thing I will call out is aeromedical. While the FAA ATC system needs to be enhanced and modernized, so does the FAA aeromedical. Dr. Susan Northrup has done a tremendous job, we believe, in moving things forward and making significant progress. However, there is more to do, and there is a lot of technology involved to help her and her team do what they need to do.

So, with that, I would like to again thank the committee for allowing us to present and opine on how things are going. And I look forward to questions from the committee over the balance of the morning.

[Mr. Pleasance's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Darren Pleasance, President and Chief Executive Officer, Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association

Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association's (AOPA) perspective on the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024.

AOPA is the world's largest aviation membership organization, representing General Aviation interests of more than 300,000 aircraft owners and pilots across the country. General Aviation consists of all operations that are not military or commercial. These include operations for personal use, recreational, business, medevac, law enforcement, agriculture, firefighting, disaster assistance, just to name a few. Our members operate at airports in thousands of communities in every State and support the local economies in these areas.

The General Aviation fleet in the United States is the largest in the world and consists of well over 200,000 active aircraft including piston, turbine, and jets. To help illustrate the enormous size of this aviation sector, in comparison, the U.S. commercial airline fleet has about 6,000 airplanes.

For 86 years, AOPA has stayed true to its mission of protecting the freedom to fly and I am proud and humbled to be only the 6th President serving the Association since its inception in 1939. Guiding, protecting, and promoting this uniquely American experience, so we can pass it along, better than we received it, to the next generation of aviators.

I would like to commend Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen and all members of the Committee for the bipartisan work in passing a 5-year FAA reau-

thorization in the last Congress. The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, Public Law 118–63, is both historic and transformative for the GA industry, as it included the first ever General Aviation title which gives undivided attention to programs and policies that directly impact the unique needs of aircraft owners and pilots.

This hearing is timely given the efforts being put forward to implement provisions included in last year's FAA Reauthorization, as well as the recent announcement by President Trump and Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy calling for a completely new and modern air traffic control system.

AOPA is a member of the Modern Skies Coalition, which represents all sectors of the aviation industry including airlines, general aviation, airports, labor, and manufacturers. The coalition strongly supports this modernization effort, and we look forward to collaborating with the Committee, Congress, and the Administration to make this proposal a reality.

Having the entire aviation industry behind this effort is both important and unique. The time to upgrade this system is now and we applaud the downpayment this Committee and the House of Representatives put forward in the recent House passed Budget Reconciliation bill, commonly referred to as the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act."

The leadership this Committee has shown in this area of air traffic control modernization is commendable, appreciated, and needed. Developing and deploying a new air traffic control system will require constant leadership, vigilance, accountability, milestones, benchmarking, incentives, and penalties if necessary. We cannot fail in getting this done.

Procurement and acquisition processes also need to be streamlined, and this effort will also require transparency and strong oversight. With the Trump Administration, Congress, and the entire aviation industry unified, we can and must get this done. Ensuring the FAA has the most updated equipment and well-trained controllers is vital to maintaining the safest, largest, and most complex system in the world.

And without a doubt, we do have the safest aviation system in the world, and it has never been safer. But that does not mean it cannot be safer than it is today. And we owe it to all who utilize this national airspace system to make it as safe as it can be and to invest in the technology and the staffing it requires to achieve that.

Impact of General Aviation

General aviation in the United States provides a significant economic impact both nationally and to the communities in which we all live—a $339 billion dollar industry supporting more than 1.3 million jobs.

Through the network of more than 5,000 public-use airports across the country as well as over 14,000 privately owned landing facilities, heliports, and airstrips nationwide, general aviation is an integral part of our nation's transportation system.

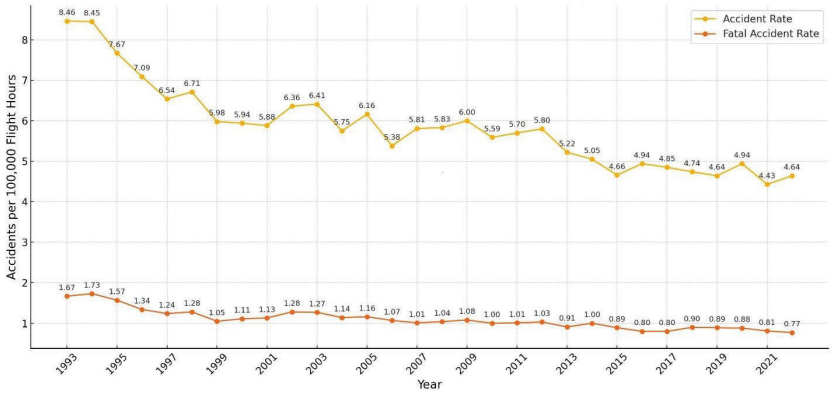
As I mentioned earlier, General Aviation also provides significant and critical public benefits. These vital operations include emergency medical personnel and supplies delivery, disaster relief and recovery, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance, law enforcement, agricultural aviation activities, and much, much more.

General Aviation Safety

While aircraft accidents often make headline news, what does not is the enormous size and scope of General Aviation, which comprises more than twenty-six million flight hours per year, representing more than thirty million takeoffs and landings by hundreds of thousands of General Aviation pilots.

The AOPA Air Safety Institute publishes safety data annually, which reviews General Aviation accidents and analyzes trends in the data. In fact, General Aviation has seen a declining accident and fatality rate for more than 30 years. Since the early 1990s, the accident rate has dropped 45 percent, and the rate of fatal accidents has fallen even more—55 percent.

General Aviation Accident and Fatal Accident Rates (1993–2022)



The graph shows the total accident and fatal accident rates for general aviation since 1993. Source: AOPA Air Safety Institute and National Transportation Safety Board.

According to the most recent FAA General Aviation and Part 135 Activity survey, there were more than 214,000 active General Aviation aircraft in the fleet. The FAA calculates that General Aviation pilots collectively fly about 28.5 million hours each year—more than 78,000 hours per day.

At AOPA, we are always working to educate and inform pilots to further improve aviation safety. On April 1st, the AOPA Air Safety Institute—with support from more than two dozen other organizations and the FAA—launched the National Pause for General Aviation Safety. Over a six-month period, pilots are being asked to take a timeout to focus on safety and review a variety of videos, courses, and articles that cover every type of GA flying. Pilots are encouraged to visit GAsafe.org to learn more.

FAA Reauthorization Implementation

Implementing the provisions from the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act is imperative to address the challenges facing the aviation industry and I will briefly discuss the status and implementation of a number of key provisions that directly and positively impact General Aviation.

Pilot and Aircraft Privacy

Pilot and aircraft privacy is an important issue. As you know, FAA's 2020 Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS–B) out mandate required pilots flying in most controlled airspace to equip their aircraft with this safety enhancing technology. More than 112,000 General Aviation aircraft are now equipped at a direct cost of more than half a billion dollars.

ADS–B out is an aviation surveillance technology that identifies the position of an aircraft and regularly broadcasts its position to controllers and other aircraft that have an ADS–B in receiver. The broadcast also provides altitude, speed, direction, and the aircraft's N-number. AOPA fully supported the 2020 mandate as we were assured ADS–B data would only be used to improve air traffic safety and airspace efficiency.

Unfortunately, we are now seeing ADS–B data being used for many other non-safety related areas including enforcement actions, frivolous lawsuits where complainants are suing for nuisance, trespass, and intentional infliction of emotional distress for aircraft flying in full compliance with FAA requirements.

Pilots are now being forced to pay expensive legal fees to defend themselves against these questionable enforcement actions and frivolous lawsuits.

Moreover, a cottage industry has emerged, and companies are now contracting with public-use airports to collect fees from pilots by gleaning ADS–B data, specifically the N number and then running it against the FAA's aircraft registry to obtain the name and address of the pilot.

These actions bring numerous safety and individual privacy concerns and are a strong deterrent for other pilots to equip with this safety technology.

In Montana, legislation to prohibit the use of ADS–B data for fee collection was recently signed into law by the governor. Similar legislation was also introduced in Minnesota. In order to avoid a patchwork of laws across the country, we strongly encourage the Committee to act in developing a national policy that ensures ADS–B data is not used for fee collection but used for its intended purpose, air traffic safety and airspace efficiencies.

To also help address the privacy concerns of aircraft owners, this committee included a key provision, section 803, in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. The act required the FAA administrator to establish, no later than 2 years after enactment, a procedure for a private aircraft owner or operator to withhold from broad dissemination or display by the FAA, the registration number and other similar identifiable data such as personally identifiable information of the aircraft owner or operator.

In response to section 803, the FAA announced this past March that the Civil Aviation Registry Electronic Services (CARES) system now allows aircraft owners to voluntarily request that their name and contact information be withheld from public access. This is a good step forward and we applaud the Committee for including this provision in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 and the FAA's prompt action.

PRICING AND FEE TRANSPARENCY

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study on the efforts of Fixed Based Operators (FBOs) to meet their voluntary commitment to improve the online transparency of prices and fees for all aircraft. AOPA has routinely heard from pilots across the country who are frustrated when they are levied with unexpected fees or are required to submit their N number in order to find out what they will be charged.

Most airports and FBOs across the country provide services to pilots at a fair and reasonable price. But for years, we have received complaints nearly every day from pilots being charged with egregious fee pricing.

The types of fees charged to pilots by some FBOs may include tie-down fees, overnight parking fees, facility fees, infrastructure fees, access fees, security fees, handling fees, habitat fees, and special event fees. Some of these fees may be waived with the purchase of fuel but pilots are simply asking for fair and reasonable fees and prices, in conformance with FAA grant assurance requirements.

AOPA led a voluntary industry campaign known as "Know Before You Go" to encourage FBOs to make their fees publicly available and while a vast majority of FBOs now openly disclose their pricing, many still do not.

We are hopeful the GAO will reach out to AOPA as it develops its report, as required by the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, to access industry compliance with this voluntary program. The report is due to Congress later this year.

In 2024, Signature Aviation, the largest FBO chain in the United States with more than 130 locations and owned by a private equity firm, took a positive step forward in responding to AOPA's call for fair and reasonable fees by lowering and standardizing its handling fees for piston aircraft at nearly all its locations. We applaud this effort and hope to see other large chain FBOs develop similar fair and reasonable pricing models for all non-commercial operators, regardless of aircraft type.

As you know, during last year's FAA Reauthorization process, AOPA was joined by nearly six hundred aviation organizations across the country in calling for fair and reasonable FBO fees in conformance with current FAA requirements. Unfortunately, this bipartisan commonsense amendment, offered by Representative Jay Obernolte (R–CA) and Representative Matt Cartwright (D–PA), was tabled in the Rules Committee.

We understand airports have financial needs, but we also believe they should be held accountable to FAA grant assurances that require any fees collected, either by an airport or a FBO, to be fair and reasonable.

EXPANSION OF BASICMED

AOPA has and continues to advocate tirelessly for medical reform. We are pleased the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 includes the expansion of BasicMed (section 828). The law Increased the maximum certified takeoff weight of a covered aircraft to 12,500 pounds (up from 6,000 pounds), increased the number of allowable passengers in a covered aircraft to six (up from five), and increased the allowable number of seats in a covered aircraft to seven (up from six). Since the program's inception in 2017, more than 90,000 pilots have qualified to safely fly with BasicMed

privileges. The FAA's final rule implementing the expansion of BasicMed went into effect on November 18, 2024.

It is important to point out that in its congressionally mandated reports, the FAA concluded BasicMed has no statistically significant impact on safety when comparing pilots flying under BasicMed to those with a third-class medical certificate.

Interestingly enough, many countries, large and small, have medical standards that, similar to BasicMed, allow licensed medical physician to conduct a physical exam on private pilots. Moreover, Mexico, The Bahamas, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau all authorize private pilots to fly with BasicMed privileges. AOPA continues to work to expand acceptance of BasicMed to Canada and appreciates the Committees inclusion of language in the FAA Reauthorization encouraging the FAA to pursue this issue with Canada.

We also appreciate the Committee including a provision requiring the FAA to stand up an Aviation Medical Working Group to develop recommendations intended to modernize the agency's medical processes and systems for pilots. This is an area that needs significant attention, especially the need to address extensive delays many pilots are experiencing with their medical applications. I am pleased, however, to report that the FAA has stood up this Working Group, as outlined in the FAA Reauthorization, and I commend the leadership of Federal Air Surgeon, Susan Northrup, for tackling this issue head on.

Expiration Date on a Flight Instructor Certificate

Another provision that was fully supported by AOPA is the expiration date on a flight instructor certificate. The FAA Administrator was directed to issue a final rule for the rulemaking activity titled 'Removal of the Expiration Date on a Flight Instructor Certificate' no later than 18 months after enactment. The final rule went into effect on December 01, 2024, removing the expiration date from flight instructor certificates, while maintaining recurrency and recent experience requirements.

Issuance of Letters of Authorization to Airmen

As a result of section 806 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, championed by Chairman Graves, the FAA has updated its guidance on authorizations to fly piston warbird airplanes by giving certain experienced pilots an easier path to add type-specific privileges. This is a positive step for this historical and highly active segment of General Aviation.

Eliminate Aircraft Registration Backlog

In recent years, the FAA's aircraft registration system caused significant delays with a chronic backlog of aircraft registration hitting a peak of 190 days in 2022. We appreciate the leadership of this Committee by including language in the FAA Reauthorization Act requiring the FAA to take necessary actions to reduce the aircraft registration backlog at the Civil Aviation Registry. The FAA recently testified that it has addressed the backlog and is now processing applications within an average of ten business days or less.

Unleaded Fuel and EAGLE Initiative

As you know, the FAA and industry stakeholders representing every corner of aviation have a vested interest in the safe transition to unleaded fuel for general aviation aircraft. Working together through the FAA and industry Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions (EAGLE) initiative, our goal is to remove lead from all aviation fuel no later than December 31, 2030.

However, until there is a viable unleaded fuel available fleet wide, it is imperative that 100LL (low lead) fuel remain available. We appreciate the leadership of this Committee for including a provision in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 that requires airports that offered 100LL aviation gasoline for sale in 2022 to continue offering the sale of 100LL until 2030 or the date on which the FAA certifies an unleaded aviation gasoline alternative is available for purchase or use by all GA aircraft operators.

Modernization of Special Airworthiness Certificates (MOSAIC)

The expansion of light sport aircraft and sport pilot privileges has been a top priority for AOPA and the general aviation community. The FAA's Modernization of Special Airworthiness Certificates (MOSAIC) initiative was introduced in July 2023,

and the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 requires the FAA to issue a final rule for MOSAIC, no later than 2 years after enactment. The FAA is currently reviewing more than 1,300 comments and is expected to issue a final rule in mid-2025, which if issued in July would meet the 2-year reauthorization requirement. We are very encouraged and supportive of this effort.

DEVELOPMENT OF PORTABLE LOW-COST VOLUNTARY ADS–B

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 also requires the FAA Administrator to prepare a report no later than 2 years after enactment on the development of a suitable position reporting system for voluntary use in covered airspace to facilitate traffic awareness and solicit advice from industry groups including pilots and aircraft owners.

We are aware the FAA is currently evaluating some electronic conspicuity (EC) devices (low-power ADS–B Out), and we are expecting a decision this year as to whether they and the FCC will approve of their use in the US.

CONCLUSION

As we look to the future, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 sets us on the right path to improve the safety and efficiency of our national airspace system. This historic legislation, with the first ever title dedicated to General Aviation, will benefit aircraft owners and pilots for years to come.

We appreciate the leadership of this Committee, FAA Acting Administrator Chris Rocheleau, and those at the FAA that have had a hand in implementing many of these important provisions in a timely manner.

I would like to thank the Subcommittee again for holding this important hearing and providing me with the opportunity to share AOPA's perspective on the status and implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, Mr. Pleasance.

With that, Mr. Bolen, you are recognized for 5—well, correction: I think Tracey Mann. Tracey would like to introduce our next witness.

Mr. MANN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am honored to introduce our next witness, Mr. Ed Bolen.

Ed is the president and CEO of the National Business Aviation Association, a position he has held since 2004, and is also from my hometown of Salina, Kansas, and a graduate of University of Kansas.

Through his role at NBAA, Ed represents more than 11,000 aviation companies and professionals who rely on general aviation aircraft, advocating for the advancement of new technologies and products, enhancing safety, and recruiting a skilled workforce, all to strengthen the future of American aviation.

Ed is also a past president and CEO of GAMA, as well.

So, thanks to his extensive knowledge and experience during his distinguished career, and I appreciate him being willing to share with us here this morning.

Thanks for being here, Ed.

TESTIMONY OF EDWARD M. BOLEN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION ASSOCIATION

Mr. BOLEN. Well, thank you for that kind introduction.

Like Congressman Mann, I am enormously proud to be a son of Kansas and to have an opportunity to represent a great American industry as we work together to do something really important for this country.

Mr. Chairman, I want to begin by acknowledging a couple things have been mentioned about safety and about the accident on January 29th. And certainly that galvanizes us, helps us understand the importance and the urgency of the work that we are doing today.

I think when you discussed last year's bill, you mentioned that it was large and that it was comprehensive. It was also very forward-leaning. Parts of the bill, including the general aviation title, the efforts to foster emerging technologies, the attention to the medical records and encouraging pilots to get help, the foundation laid on NOTAMs, and all of the efforts on workforce are really critical.

And I think now that that bill is the law of the land, we have a clear pathway on where we go from here.

First, it is critical that we implement that bill. And I commend you for the hearing that was held on the 1-year anniversary and continuing those hearings today.

I think what we are seeing is, there are parts of that bill that are being moved out on and moved out quickly. We are enormously pleased, for example, that the SFAR related to advanced air mobility and the pilot training has been done, and we are looking forward to those aircraft being certified soon. And BVLOS was mentioned; we are anticipating action on that. So I think a lot of good work is being done.

I think all of us need to commit to making sure that great bill is implemented. So, that is step number one.

Step number two is, we need to move forward on the plan that was laid out on May 8 by the Secretary and by the FAA Administrator. I think what we recognize is that what was being proposed, what is on the table, is something that is unique in its scope, in its specificity, and its accountability, and, importantly, its timelines.

The proposal focuses on modernizing by investing in people, facilities, and equipment. And, to that end, we have the Secretary who has called for 14,000 air traffic controllers—highly skilled, highly motivated—and we see steps being taken to make that a reality. That is a critical issue.

With regard to facilities, he has laid out investments that need to be made: 6 air traffic control centers, deployment of 15 TRACONs, 15 new towers. He has made it clear that we want to increase connectivity with broadband, with cellular, with satellite. And he has made sure that we are focused on bringing in the latest generation of radios and radars. And, in fact, yesterday, I saw that he announced bringing in industry for a conversation on how we can get this done.

I think it is really important to underscore that the entire industry is united in this proposal under the Modern Skies banner. I think this is probably as united as our community has been for an investment in our air transportation system since the creation of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund in 1970.

I think, importantly, the community is united on getting this done and not being distracted with debates that look to others, including Canada with their overhyped and underperforming models. I think what we see is the opportunity for American innovation and American ingenuity to lead the way.

And I can't imagine a more fitting way to honor the legacy of the families and the victims of the 29th of January accident than having us make sure that the United States continues to have the largest, the safest, the most diverse mix of aircraft and operations anywhere in the world.

We want to lead and continue to have the United States be the gold standard for all things aviation.

[Mr. Bolen's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Edward M. Bolen, President and Chief Executive Officer, National Business Aviation Association

Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the Subcommittee on Aviation, thank you for holding this hearing to address aviation safety and the bipartisan 2024 FAA Reauthorization bill. On behalf of the National Business Aviation Association's (NBAA's) 11,000-member companies, I am honored to testify at this hearing.

I would like to start by acknowledging the heartbreaking accident that took place in the shadow of our nation's Capital on January 29th. As members of the aviation community we feel and mourn the loss of every crewmember and every passenger. Our hearts go out to the victims and their families. Every incident and accident is a solemn reminder that our work to improve safety in the national airspace system (NAS) is not done.

A year ago, Congress, led by this Committee, laid the foundation for a safer, more efficient NAS with a comprehensive, bipartisan five-year FAA Reauthorization bill that:

- Included the first ever General Aviation (GA) Title;
- Enhances flight security;
- Ushers in the next generation of aircraft;
- Modernizes medical standards, allowing crewmembers to get the help they need;
- Upgrades the NOTAM system; and
- Develops the future workforce.

With the Reauthorization bill now the law of the land, the path forward is clear.

One, we must ensure the implementation of the bill. The good news is that, with the strong oversight of this Committee, that is beginning to happen. For example, the FAA has already published the rules for operating powered-lift air taxis and evaluated check pilot requirements.

Two, we urgently need to make a massive investment in our national airspace system—in people, facilities, and equipment.

On May 8th, Secretary Duffy unveiled the Administration's Air Traffic Control (ATC) Modernization Plan. It is a plan that is unique from any before it—in its scope, specificity, accountability, and the fact that it establishes a clear deadline. By the end of 2028, the plan calls for an investment in people that will provide the United States with over 14,000 well-trained and highly skilled air traffic controllers. The plan calls for us to invest in facilities by building six new state-of-the-art air traffic control centers, and new radars, radios, and other equipment.

The investment in people, facilities, and equipment that the Administration is proposing is a national imperative. The system is under stress. We are at a unique moment in time—one that calls us to honor the legacy of those we've lost and to meet the challenges with American innovation, ingenuity and decisive action.

The entirety of the aviation industry, including airlines, general aviation, airports, and labor has come together, through the Modern Skies Coalition, in support of the ATC modernization plan. Not since the establishment of the Airport & Airway Trust Fund in 1970 has the entire aviation industry been this united and focused in its support for major investment in our air transportation system.

Importantly, the Coalition has stated that it opposes any effort that would distract from the Administration's plan. That includes any effort to model the U.S. system on the type of overhyped and dramatically underperforming models in Canada and the United Kingdom.

We are world leaders in every aspect of aviation. We have the opportunity to ensure that is true for decades to come.

GA Action on Safety

These recent events serve as a stark reminder of the critically important role of safety. The business aviation industry holds safety as a core value guiding our actions every day and every flight. Despite the perception based on recent high-profile events, fatal accidents are trending down. Preliminary data indicates there were fewer fatal accidents in the first part of 2025 than 2024. This continues a longer trend. Over the past 30 years, the GA fatal accident rate fell by 60%. Still, NBAA and the general aviation community are committed to further reducing the fatal accident rate. The General Aviation Joint Safety Committee set a goal in 2019 to reduce the fatal accident rate by an additional 10%. The community remains on pace to exceed that safety goal.

The business aviation community works hard not only to be safe, but to be perceived as safe. In response to incidents and accidents this year, the general aviation community launched a National Pause for General Aviation Safety to reflect on safety and commit to working together towards further improvements.

NBAA and others have teamed up to make tools and resources available. For instance, the Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing (ASIAS) program allows the entire aviation community to pool data for beneficial safety improvements. As data analysis tools become more accessible, we expect this tool to become even more important. NBAA is also supporting increased use of data sharing to continually refine safety training; recommitment to a just-culture framework for accident assessment; and continued adoption and implementation of safety management systems (SMS).

Modernizing ATC: A National Imperative

The ATC system is in urgent need of an infrastructure overhaul and staffing support. In addition to the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, Congress and the administration can help improve the safety and efficiency of the NAS by advancing DOT's ATC modernization plan.

Modernizing America's ATC infrastructure is essential for enabling the numerous advantages of business aviation in the United States. We thank you for committing $12.5 billion as a downpayment towards infrastructure improvements and air traffic controller hiring. It will enable the modernization of critical infrastructure such as air traffic control towers, terminal approach facilities and centers, radar and ground stations, telecommunications hardware, and automation software. It will help retain and recruit controllers, and accelerate training for new recruits—strengthening a workforce that is stretched thin. However, the system needs $18.5 billion in additional funding over the next three years, to make these urgent capital improvements and realize the benefits of modern technology or we will repeat the failures of the past. Minor investments over multiple decades led to a system that required the "dumbing down" of new technology to integrate into old legacy systems, never allowing the NAS to enjoy the full benefit of cutting edge tools and equipment.

NBAA and the Modern Skies Coalition are unified in our support for this historic funding infusion. However, the Coalition is aligned against privatizing the air traffic control system. Privatized foreign air traffic control systems held up as models of modernization suffer from controller shortages, massive system delays, technology breakdowns, and repeated calls for transparency and leadership. Most alarmingly, the International Civil Aviation Organization recently found that Canada's safety oversight of Nav Canada has fallen dramatically over the past twenty years, assigning a "C" grade to the agency. Instead, we are committed to investing in the safety and efficiency of the nation's air transportation system.

These investments ensure the FAA has the tools, facilities, workforce and equipment it needs to safely manage 50,000 flights daily, transporting more than 2.9 million passengers across 29 million square miles of airspace.

It will enable business aviation to continue transporting people and cargo, conducting air medical flights for organs and patients, providing natural disaster response and helping businesses be more competitive—connecting communities in every state and nearly every congressional district, especially those with little or no airline service. Business aviation bolsters our national economy with 1.3 million American jobs and $340 billion in economic output.

Prioritizing FAA Reauthorization Implementation

As important as ATC modernization is the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, which recognizes the importance of the General Aviation sector and the safe integration of new entrants, it also ensures that America will continue

to lead the world in aviation safety, security, sustainability, innovation, workforce development and investment in airports.

OVERDUE OVERHAUL OF NOTAM SYSTEM

The FAA is in the midst of making long-needed improvements to the Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) system. When the nation's air traffic came to a halt for the first time since 9/11, it became clear we could not wait to overhaul the FAA's primary tool for notifying pilots and flight planners about hazards en route or at their destination. The FAA expects to deploy the new version of this critical system by September 2025. The welcome upgrade will ensure reliability and better information for flight crews, resulting in higher levels of safety, and there are valuable lessons to be learned in the context of ATC modernization, from the agile acquisition process that was used to implement the new system.

STRENGTHENING FLIGHT SECURITY—SEC. 803

In the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, Congress recognized the importance of flight security by directing the FAA to restrict the publication of personally identifying information that could compromise security. The FAA announced in March an option to not disclose personal security information on the aircraft registry. This action mitigates threats to security, while maintaining the ability to perform necessary functions, such as maintenance, safety checks, and regulatory compliance. The business aviation community is engaging in public comment to ensure the enactment of this provision avoids any unintended consequences, such as restricting access to important information necessary to conduct aircraft transactions and meet other regulatory requirements.

MAINTAIN U.S. LEADERSHIP IN ADVANCED AIR MOBILITY—TITLE IX, SUBTITLE B

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 includes the first-ever Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) Subtitle. This accomplishment recognizes the impact of new entrants. As the U.S. competes to lead the world in the era of air taxis, decisive and ambitious action is needed by the FAA, and this bill provides the foundation to do so.

It is crucial to our nation's ability to maintain global competitiveness and leadership in aerospace that innovation be safely and efficiently brought to market in the U.S. The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 expressed Congress's desire for the United States to position itself as a global leader in AAM, and directed the FAA to work with manufacturers, prospective operators, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the safe, expeditious rollout of these aircraft. The FAA must dedicate appropriate staffing to meet this pressing need. Autonomous AAM operations are already happening in China. To maintain our edge, the industry needs established certification standards and the FAA must meet Congress's mandate to work transparently with industry and stick to certification timelines. Only with diligence, transparency, and collaboration will this technology be made in the USA.

Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies—Sec. 961

Senator Cruz recently announced the FAA's new Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies will have a home in Texas. The center of excellence will support the testing and advancement of new and emerging aviation technologies, including autonomous AAM. The support has been welcomed by the innovative new entrants coming to our airspace. Yet, the FAA must accompany the center of excellence with the required demonstration zones and testing corridors, which will allow them to validate technologies and air traffic requirements, or risk falling behind foreign competition.

FAA Research and Development—Sec. 1044

The Reauthorization bill required the FAA to submit a report by February 2025 on the FAA's actions and progress using research and development to inform FAA certification guidance and regulations for autonomous flight and remotely piloted operations beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS). To fully unlock the potential of these new technologies and keep pace with foreign regulators, we need an update on the status of this report and assurance from the FAA that they are prioritizing the integration of autonomous and BVLOS operations.

Powered Lift Special Federal Aviation Regulation—Sec. 955

The FAA made significant progress in ushering in the next generation of aircraft in October 2024, when they published the Powered Lift Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) in accordance with Section 955 of the Reauthorization at NBAA's Business Aviation Convention and Exhibition. The SFAR included standards for

pilot qualifications, established energy reserve requirements, and provided a mechanism for future performance-based rules. While creating the first new aircraft category in two generations is a welcome step, the FAA must continue to ensure requirements match reality as these aircraft gain experience in the years to come.

Autonomous Operations

America has long been the world leader in aviation and innovation. However, our competitive edge is at risk. Other countries are flying powered lift vehicles, and China is conducting autonomous operations. In addition to establishing a national airspace lab like the Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies, the FAA must take steps to ensure autonomous operations will seamlessly integrate into the airspace. Only with appropriate staffing and clear certification guidelines will the FAA facilitate timely entry into service of this historic new aircraft type.

These provisions, with Congress's ongoing oversight and leadership, ensure that America remains the world leader in innovation and aerospace.

FACILITATE SCALABLE SMS IMPLEMENTATION—SEC. 308

The FAA's Part 5 SMS regulation provides a structured framework for operators of all sizes to manage safety risks systematically and effectively. The updated FAA Part 5 SMS regulations expand the requirement for implementing an SMS to more organizations, including Part 91.147 air tour operators and Part 135 on-demand, air charter operators. NBAA and the FAA provide numerous resources to guide operators through the SMS implementation process, aiding compliance with national and international standards in the next two years.

It is imperative that every SMS policy reiterate the scalable nature of SMS. The rule itself is high-level, requiring operators to address the four pillars of SMS: safety policy, safety risk management, safety assurance, and safety promotion. But, the devil is in the details. Alongside the Part 5 regulations, the FAA also updated its advisory circular, inspector guidance, and safety assurance system. Each of these documents must reinforce scalability.

The complexity of policies safety inspectors deem acceptable will drive the burden of this regulation. What works for one operation may not be appropriate for another. Policies that work for a major airline may not be appropriate for a charter operator with a single aircraft and a single Pilot in Command. Regulators may have difficulty understanding what a small—or very small—organization is capable of doing, and how to adjust and adapt the framework so that it can work for everybody

For example, some businesses elect to certificate their flight department under part 135, opting for the oversight and higher safety standards. When, prior to the mandatory rule, some of these certificated business flight departments opted to seek FAA approval of voluntary SMS, some FAA inspectors had difficulty understanding that these organizations were different from 121 air carriers. The inspectors balked at scaled policies and unique reporting structures. It took months to sort out. Rather than focus on implementing the safety program, these flight departments were forced to divert resources to fight unclear, unscaled policies.

Getting bogged down in bureaucratic policies will detract from the safety-enhancing capability SMS can provide to flight operations. Congress must continue to oversee the FAA's implementation of scalable SMS requirements.

EMBRACE MODERN MEDICAL PROTOCOLS—SEC. 411 AND 413

Medical processes and understanding continuously undergo review and evaluation. They evolve with modern science. However, the FAA's protocols and standards remain woefully outdated and in need of reform. Fortunately, the Reauthorization bill directed the FAA to begin modernizing.

The medical modernization efforts are already underway. The FAA concluded a pilot mental health rulemaking committee last year with leadership from NBAA. And, this spring, the FAA kicked off two working groups that will support reviewing medical processes, policies and procedures, ensuring timely and efficient certification of airmen. The modernization effort will result in updates to the Guide for Aviation Medical Examiners. The updates will in turn provide better insight for pilots into what medical examiners are looking for and what might cost the pilot his or her medical.

The medical modernization effort and sufficient staffing of the office remain critical to safety. Pilots and others holding FAA medical certificates must be confident in the medical certification process to feel comfortable seeking the help and treatment they need. An outdated system risks pilots flying with undiagnosed or untreated maladies. An understaffed medical office means pilots needlessly wait for paperwork to be reviewed. A modern, adequately staffed medical certificate program

can provide pilots confidence that they will be able to return to the cockpit after visiting a doctor.

Withholding a pilot's medical certificate for mental health or other issues means not only that the pilot cannot pursue a livelihood, it means they cannot feed their families. When a pilot visits a doctor today, the pilot does not know if or when he or she will be able to return to flying. The FAA's head medical professional, Dr. Susan Northrop, has often said that if we can track a delivery pizza order, we should be able to track something so much more important—the review and approval of medical certificates. Congress should continue to monitor the development of this secure medical certification portal and tracker, which will provide insight on if and when pilots can return to their profession.

HARMONIZE SUPPLEMENTAL OXYGEN RULES—SEC. 834

It remains critical that the FAA continue to modernize safety regulations, including regulations related to supplemental oxygen. Sec. 834 directs the FAA to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking that would harmonize part 135 supplemental oxygen requirements with the rules for part 121. Harmonization will enhance communication, decrease the chances of spreading contagions, reduce fatigue, and reflect the reliability of modern aircraft.

EMBRACE DIGITIZATION AND BRING FAA INTO THE 21ST CENTURY—SEC. 220

The FAA must continue to modernize. Congress required the FAA to bring three paper based certification processes into the digital era. Within six months of the bill, the FAA must identify three certification processes that could be replaced with internet-based data management processes that allow applicants and the FAA to track progress. Outdated, bureaucratic processes remain a barrier to aerospace innovation and efficient aviation operations. The FAA must begin stepping into the modern era by digitizing analog processes to reduce backlogs and ensure American aviators and American businesses keep up with foreign competitors.

ELEVATE THE OFFICE OF RULEMAKING—SEC. 202

Congress required the FAA to elevate the agency's rulemaking function by establishing an Assistant Administrator for Rulemaking and Regulatory Improvement. The role is critical for improving safety; establishing priorities aligned with the Administration; reviewing burdensome and inefficient or outdated rules; coordinating with other Federal entities; and promulgating regulatory updates that are in the best interest of the public. The FAA repeatedly claims they only have the capacity to pass a handful of rules each year, so it is imperative that a leader ensures the process is efficient and well prioritized.

BOLSTER THE AEROSPACE WORKFORCE—TITLE IV

I commend Congress for its bipartisan collaboration with NBAA and others to include workforce-focused provisions in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. Investing in a highly trained and dedicated workforce is absolutely paramount not just for industry, but for the citizens, companies and communities that depend on it. By dedicating all of Title IV to workforce development, Congress recognized the importance of addressing the aerospace workforce. This legislation addresses and removes barriers for individuals pursuing careers in aviation, broadens the industry's workforce pipeline, and improves training standards.

Analysts predict that hundreds of thousands of aviation professionals with a diversity of skill sets will be needed in the coming decades. However, barriers to growing the needed workforce include financial obstacles, cultural barriers, and limited access to information. The Youth Access to American Jobs in Aviation Task Force, Bessie Coleman Women in Aviation Advisory Committee, and national strategic plan for aviation workforce development underscore the importance of recruiting, retaining and engaging aviation talent. These initiatives will energize the work needed to remove existing barriers and ensure a large, qualified and diverse cohort of professionals is equipped to lead the industry into the future.

MEETING THE MOMENT

America has the safest, largest, most diverse, and most efficient aviation system in the world. Yet, the system is under stress, which increases risk and decreases efficiency. We must take action. Last year, Congress passed comprehensive, bipartisan legislation that would repair historic systems, reinforce current programs, and

pave the way for the future. We stand ready to help the Congress and the Administration take additional steps to make an urgent investment in ATC modernization.

Thank you to the subcommittee for holding this hearing. NBAA looks forward to working alongside Congress and the FAA to maintain and improve safety in air transportation and ensure the U.S. remains the global leader in aviation.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, Mr. Bolen.

Mr. Robbins, you are recognized.

TESTIMONY OF MICHAEL ROBBINS, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, ASSOCIATION FOR UNCREWED VEHICLE SYSTEMS INTERNATIONAL

Mr. ROBBINS. Thank you, Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, and distinguished members of the committee.

I am Michael Robbins. I am the president and CEO of AUVSI. We are the world's largest trade association representing the uncrewed systems, robotics, and autonomy industry. And I am delighted to be here with you today representing our members in the UAS, or drone, and advanced air mobility industries.

It is a particularly significant week for our industry, particularly the drone side, as we expect that the Trump administration will release a series of Executive orders on the drone industry this week, reflecting the growing national priority placed on uncrewed systems.

And while we await the official details, AUVSI has been working closely with the administration, engaged throughout this process, and stands ready to work with both the White House and Congress to accelerate safe integration, enhance security, and strengthen U.S. leadership.

AUVSI, like our colleagues, commends this committee's leadership in crafting and passing the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, which obviously represents a strong, bipartisan commitment to strengthening safety, fast-tracking innovation, and preserving U.S. leadership in global aviation.

And our industry, in particular, welcomed the clarity and direction the law provided in specific titles which will guide the safe and scalable integration of drones and AAM technologies into the national airspace, including mandating performance-based rulemaking and expanding certification pathways.

But, as mentioned, legislation is only the beginning. The promise of this reauthorization and its impact on jobs and public safety, infrastructure, and, importantly, global leadership and competitiveness depends entirely on how well and how quickly the law is implemented.

Today, we are going to highlight where the FAA is making progress, where it is falling behind, and how this committee's continued oversight is critical to meeting the full potential of the law.

So, a few key points.

First, we appreciate the FAA's recent momentum in approving more waivers and exemptions for beyond visual line of sight, or BVLOS, operations. These approvals are indeed driving real-world value in public safety, infrastructure inspection, agriculture, disaster response, and more.

However, these case-by-case waivers are not a substitute for a comprehensive rule, and they do not allow the industry to scale. This delays investment, operational planning, and public benefit.

As Chairman Nehls mentioned, section 930 of the reauthorization law set firm deadlines for the long-awaited part 108 BVLOS rule. The first of those deadlines has been missed, and it has been missed, as of today, by 261 days. And, yep, we are counting, because every day matters to our industry.

We got very close last year after a valiant effort by the FAA to move the rule forward, but, ultimately, bureaucracy won. Today, due to the leadership of Secretary Duffy and Administrator Rocheleau, the draft rule is back at the White House for the interagency review, and we have urged the immediate release of the draft.

And, again, it is a draft. We have repeatedly reminded the regulators that this is only a step in the process and it is by no means the end of the rulemaking. And, accordingly, perfect should not be the enemy of the good for a draft.

We urge the administration to maintain momentum and deliver a final rule as close as possible to the original statutory deadline.

And that same urgency applies to section 2209 of the 2016 FAA Extension Act, reaffirmed in section 929 of the 2024 reauthorization, directing the FAA to establish a process for critical infrastructure operators to petition for restrictions on drone flights near sensitive sites. Nearly a decade later, that process still doesn't exist.

Beyond rulemaking, the FAA must also move quickly to implement section 906, which directs the agency to study and adopt electronic conspicuity solutions.

In an increasingly complex airspace, especially at lower altitudes, situational awareness is vital. As my colleague at AOPA mentioned, ADS–B coverage is limited and not mandated in all airspace, and many types of aircraft lack broadcast capability.

But electronic conspicuity technologies available in the marketplace today and used elsewhere in the world can help scale and close that gap, enhancing safety and driving us towards a zero-collision airspace. This technology enables mutual awareness between all aircraft, protecting safety and privacy, while enhancing operational flexibility. And the FAA should move swiftly to approve and promote these technologies.

We would also like to thank this committee, as well as Secretary Duffy and Administrator Rocheleau, for moving boldly with plans to upgrade our aging air traffic control system. AUVSI is also a proud member of the Modern Skies Coalition, and we urge that modernization investments include low-altitude airspace awareness and digital infrastructure investments to ensure the future national airspace can safely accommodate both crewed and autonomous operations at scale.

Thank you for your leadership and for holding this important oversight hearing. The FAA Reauthorization Act offers a bold roadmap for the future of aviation. Now it is time to execute.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.

[Mr. Robbins' prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Michael Robbins, President and Chief Executive Officer, Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International

INTRODUCTION

Thank you, Subcommittee Chairman Nehls, Subcommittee Ranking Member Cohen, Full Committee Chairman Graves, Full Committee Ranking Member Larsen, and distinguished members of the Committee and Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify before this important hearing.

My name is Michael Robbins, and I am the President & CEO of the Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI), the world's largest industry association representing the uncrewed systems, robotics, and autonomy industry. Our members create systems that operate in the air, on the ground, and in the water across the civil, commercial, and defense domains. Today, I am honored to appear before the Aviation Subcommittee representing our members in the Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS or drones) and Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) industries, as well as the UAS Detection & Mitigation industry, and enabling and supporting technologies of these industries. On behalf of AUVSI, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the progress and implementation of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118–63) from the stakeholder perspective. We also commend this Committee, and your colleagues on the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, for recently holding hearings to receive testimony from government witnesses on the progress and implementation of P.L. 118–63.

We are at a pivotal moment in aviation history, with drones and AAM aircraft offering the potential to unlock significant benefits in both safety and technological leadership. With those benefits will come tremendous economic activity and workforce opportunities. Drones offer a safe, cost-effective solution for critical operations including public safety, precision agriculture, utilities maintenance, infrastructure inspections, medical and package delivery, and much more. AAM, which includes both regional and urban passenger and cargo carrying applications, is revolutionizing propulsion systems, battery technology, and flight controls, unlocking new opportunities in both metropolitan and rural areas not served by traditional aviation, and enhancing workforce productivity and safety. Companies are opening high-rate production facilities and creating thousands of high-quality manufacturing jobs at an increasing rate.

P.L. 118–63 was a landmark achievement for aviation policy and is helping to drive the drone and AAM industry forward. The law reflects a strong, bipartisan commitment to safety, innovation, and U.S. leadership in the rapidly evolving domains of drones and AAM. AUVSI is deeply grateful to Members of this Committee and your staff for your sustained leadership in crafting and passing this forward-looking legislation. Now, swift implementation of this legislation is critical to ensuring the meaningful integration of safe, secure, and scalable uncrewed and advanced aviation technologies into American skies. We are therefore grateful that the Committee is holding this hearing to gather stakeholder perspectives on implementation, executing its chief mandate of overseeing the FAA and Department of Transportation (DOT).

We are encouraged by the law's emphasis on risk-based, performance-oriented regulatory principles. This approach is essential to enabling innovation without compromising safety. The inclusion of dozens of key provisions, particularly throughout Titles IX and X, ensures the FAA is directed to modernize its rulemaking authority, accelerate integration of emerging technologies, and invest in workforce development. AUVSI is closely monitoring all of these provisions, as these elements are critical to ensuring U.S. leadership in global aviation, and specifically in the drone and AAM industries, for decades to come.

As we evaluate implementation to date, however, we remain concerned by slow progress in several key areas that are vital to the future of uncrewed and autonomous flight.

Below are key P.L. 118–63 sections AUVSI urges the Aviation Subcommittee, and broader Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and the FAA, to focus on as implementation continues:

SECTION 930—BEYOND VISUAL LINE OF SIGHT OPERATIONS (BVLOS) FOR UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS

Directs the FAA to issue notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) on BVLOS within four (4) months of enactment to establish a performance-based regulatory pathway for UAS to operate BVLOS. Section 930 also directs the Administrator to issue a final rule within sixteen (16) months of the draft rule.

The drone industry stands on the precipice of a new era. With the appropriate risk-based regulatory framework, the United States will lead the world in drone innovation, safety, and integration. Central to this opportunity is the timely issuance of an enabling rule for BVLOS operations, frequently referred to as Part 108. Studies project that drones will contribute billions to the U.S. economy over the next decade, enhance public safety, and create new, good-paying jobs. However, without the BVLOS rule in place, much of that potential remains unrealized.

Industry delivered to the FAA the FAA-chartered UAS BVLOS Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) report in March of 2022—thirty-nine (39) months ago—however, we do not yet have a draft rule from the FAA.[1] AUVSI appreciates the oversight of Congress on the Part 108 rulemaking, specifically Section 930 of P.L. 118–63.

This oversight is key, as, unfortunately, the Congressional statutory deadline to issue a BVLOS NPRM within four months of enactment was missed. Pursuant to Section 930, that deadline was September 16, 2024, or two hundred and sixty-one (261) days ago. Yes, we are counting. Every single day matters. This delay is impacting the industry's ability to scale critical operations in public safety, disaster response, infrastructure inspection, agriculture, delivery, and other critical missions, and make informed business decisions.

The NPRM as drafted by the FAA was sent to DOT for review in late July of 2024 in an attempt to meet the Congressional deadline of September 16, 2024. AUVSI applauds the efforts of the FAA to stick to the timeline to the greatest extent possible. Unfortunately, despite aggressive efforts by AUVSI to unlock the rule from DOT, there it remained until mid-November 2024, an unusually long timeline, especially for a draft rule. Once released from DOT, the NPRM began interagency review by the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) last year. AUVSI, alongside our member companies and other industry stakeholders, held multiple engagements with OMB and OIRA urging its immediate release.[2]

Unfortunately, the previous Administration did not release the draft before the end of their term, the change in Administration, and the temporary moratorium on new rulemakings that followed.

Under the new Administration, and the leadership of acting FAA Administrator, Chris Rocheleau, and DOT Secretary, Sean Duffy, the NPRM was sent back to OIRA on May 13, 2025.[3] AUVSI urges its immediate release and is once again meeting with OIRA staff and the interagency team to make our case for releasing the draft rule quickly.

We have repeatedly reminded regulators that the NPRM represents only a step in the process and is by no means the end of the rulemaking. Accordingly, perfect should not be the enemy of the good in a draft, and instead, progress should continue to be made in the process allowing industry, government, and other stakeholders an opportunity to review the draft and offer feedback. Then, the FAA will have time to adjudicate the comments and edit the rule before the entire process of DOT, interagency, and OIRA review occurs again before publishing a final rule.

Section 930 allows for sixteen (16) months between the NPRM and the final rule for adjudication of comments received and for the interagency process ahead of final issuance. That timeline is now also off track, however, as this timeline assumed a four-month timeline to the NPRM, which is now more than eight and a half (8.5) months off track.

Next Steps: AUVSI asks Congress to maintain direct and regular oversight of the FAA, DOT, and the interagency to:

- Issue the Part 108 NPRM immediately.
- Maintain a tight timeline for NPRM comments with no extensions provided if requested.

We also request Congress embolden the FAA to make every effort to stick to the statutory deadline in Section 930 for final rule issuance to the greatest extent possible and to maintain the same encouragement of DOT, the interagency, and OIRA, as we appreciate that the FAA does not have full control over the final rule's release

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[1] https://www.faa.gov/regulations_policies/rulemaking/committees/documents/index.cfm/document/information/documentID/5424

[2] November 22, 2024 Meeting—AUVSI and Commercial Drone Alliance (CDA) Leadership; December 2, 2024 Meeting—Public Safety/Law Enforcement/Physical Security Sector Companies; December 3, 2024 Meeting—Third Party Service Providers; December 4, 2024 Meeting—Agriculture Sector Companies; December 5, 2024 Meeting—Critical Infrastructure/ Utilities/Energy Sector Companies; December 5, 2024 Meeting—Package Delivery/Healthcare Sector Companies; December 6, 2024 Meeting—Newsgathering/Filmmaking/Entertainment Sector Companies

[3] https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eoDetails?rrid=944512

once they have completed their work. AUVSI believes that with a tight NRPM comment deadline, the incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) tools to help sort comments for adjudication, and a streamlined interagency OIRA process, a two hundred and forty (240) day timeline from NPRM to final rule is feasible and should be the goal. This would put the final rule close to meeting Congress' original statutory deadline set in Section 930.

The continued stagnation on Part 108 threatens to stall broader innovation and economic growth. Current BVLOS operations require costly, time-consuming, case-by-case FAA approvals and rulemaking that hinder scalability and investment. That said, for now, these waivers and exemptions are the only way forward until the final rule is published. Accordingly, to maintain momentum, the FAA must continue issuing waivers and exemptions under the current framework to allow risk- and performance-based BVLOS operations in the interim. This is essential to enable planning, investment, and operational growth.

Positively, we have seen a dramatic increase in the rate and speed of these BVLOS waivers and exemptions for many types of operations, including infrastructure inspection, delivery, and public safety. This is a great example of FAA and DOT using their own flexibility to bring drone technology forward, which is having direct and tangible results in 2025. AUVSI and our members applaud the FAA for their great work in this area.

SECTION 202—ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR RULEMAKING AND REGULATORY IMPROVEMENT

Creates an Office of Rulemaking and Regulatory Improvement, led by an Assistant Administrator, to enhance accountability and transparency in the FAA's rulemaking process.

Slow, opaque rulemaking has delayed critical UAS and AAM regulations, creating uncertainty and discouraging investment. Elevating the rulemaking function will help set clear priorities, track progress, and address systemic and bureaucratic bottlenecks within the FAA. Without regulatory agility, the U.S. risks falling behind in the race for aviation leadership, with countries like the People's Republic of China (PRC) moving aggressively to deploy and export UAS and AAM solutions.

Next Steps: AUVSI strongly supports the creation of the Office of Rulemaking and Regulatory Improvement and urges the FAA to:

- Fully stand up the office with adequate resources and staffing.
- Appoint a qualified Assistant Administrator with a clear mandate to prioritize UAS and AAM rules.
- Publicly track timelines for rulemakings and stakeholder engagement.

This reform is critical to restoring confidence in the FAA's ability to regulate at the speed of innovation.

SECTIONS 229 AND 916—ADVANCED AVIATION INDUSTRY COMMITTEES

Section 229 of the FAA Reauthorization Act establishes a leadership-level steering committee to coordinate across the FAA's lines of business and develop a cohesive strategy for integrating advanced aviation technologies. This steering committee is required to be in place by early 2025, yet to date, there has been no public update on its structure, priorities, or membership.

In parallel, Section 916 directs the FAA to form a new "Unmanned and Autonomous Flight Advisory Committee," replacing the former Advanced Aviation Advisory Committee, which P.L. 118–63 directed the FAA to sunset, which happened in May 2024. This new advisory body is intended to serve as a formal mechanism for collaboration between the FAA and industry experts on policy and guidance for safe autonomous aircraft operations. Again, to date, there has been no public update on this new committee from the FAA. To ensure the two committees' effectiveness, we strongly recommend that the FAA engage with AUVSI and other industry stakeholders in advance to identify key issues and confirm that the group includes senior leaders with the authority to drive cross-agency alignment.

Next Steps: We respectfully urge the Committee to confirm the FAA's timeline for establishing the advisory committees and to ensure that adequate resources are committed to support their formation and ongoing work. These two provisions and the industry advisory committees they mandate are essential for establishing a clear FAA direction and ensuring industry alignment as we enter the next phase of uncrewed aviation.

SECTION 745—ELECTRIC AIRCRAFT INFRASTRUCTURE PILOT PROGRAM

Establishes guidance and eligibility under the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) for a pilot program to fund ground infrastructure and support equipment for AAM operations.

Some AAM aircraft require new ground support systems, including charging stations and maintenance facilities. Federal support through AIP ensures that smaller and regional airports can participate in AAM development opening access to more markets, users, and use cases. Pilot programs enable demonstration of emerging technologies while ensuring public investment aligns with community needs.

Next Steps: The FAA should issue clear program guidance and eligibility criteria, enabling airports to apply for funding and begin preparing for AAM integration.

SECTION 906—ELECTRONIC CONSPICUITY (EC) STUDY

Directs the FAA to conduct a comprehensive study on EC technologies, with the goal of improving situational awareness, enabling safer UAS integration into the national airspace system (NAS), and supporting scalable, cooperative operations at low altitudes.

AUVSI supports a future where there are zero air or ground aircraft collisions. Universal adoption of EC is a way to bring this into reality by giving all users of the NAS situational awareness of other local users so that they can be detected and avoided.

Today, in the increasingly complex environment of the NAS, particularly at lower altitudes where both crewed and uncrewed aircraft routinely operate, the need for enhanced situational awareness is intensifying. ADS–B, however, is not mandated for all airspace users and in all airspace. While ADS–B Out is required in certain controlled airspace under 14 CFR 91.225, large portions of the NAS user community remain unequipped with ADS–B, with many general aviation (GA) aircraft, as well as gliders, balloons, parachuters, ultralights, and some aerial applicators, facing practical or technical limitations that make ADS–B Out installation impractical. To address these gaps, there is a pressing need for an FAA approved low-cost, low-power EC solution that enables aircraft to broadcast their position and be detected by others nearby, supporting safe operations across all airspace users.

Low-power, low-cost, portable EC solutions available on the marketplace now, but not yet FAA approved, could ensure all users can participate in a cooperative safety environment. It is noteworthy that portable low-power EC devices are approved in other nations, including the United Kingdom, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand. Importantly, low-power EC supports pilot autonomy while protecting operator privacy and discouraging misuse of location data for enforcement or fees. This is a key issue for adoption among certain segments of the aviation community.

Universal EC offers a realistic, scalable path to eliminating air and ground collisions by enabling shared visibility and mutual situational awareness among all airspace users. As detailed in the BVLOS ARC, drone operators are committed to yielding right-of-way to manned aircraft broadcasting EC signals—but cannot avoid aircraft they cannot electronically "see."

Next Steps: AUVSI asks Congress to ensure the FAA:

- Expedites the Section 906 study and engage GA, UAS, and public safety stakeholders to ensure diverse operational needs are considered.
- Uses study findings to define performance-based EC standards that promote adoption, enhance safety, and support long-term scalability across the NAS.
- Adopts low-power, low-cost, portable EC technologies for use in the NAS and drives towards a universal adoption mandate.

Universal EC is a foundational enabler of safe, cooperative flight. Swift implementation of Section 906 will help deliver a more connected, collaborative, and collision-free future for American aviation.

SECTION 907—REMOTE IDENTIFICATION (REMOTE ID) ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF COMPLIANCE

Requires the FAA to establish a process for accepting alternative methods of compliance with Remote ID regulations.

Remote ID compliance is presently hovering around 50%, which is a strong indication that the current model is not working as intended. Allowing alternative compliance pathways could promote technological innovation while maintaining safety and accountability. Clear guidance from the FAA on acceptable alternatives will reduce regulatory uncertainty, improve airspace awareness, and encourage compliance.

Next Steps: The FAA must develop, in coordination with stakeholders, a framework for evaluating and approving alternative compliance mechanisms, supported by clear, risk-based criteria. Furthermore, as it relates to the existing standard for broadcast Remote ID, industry, the FAA, and other U.S. government agencies have demonstrated through multiple test environments that broadcast Remote ID can be cost-effective tool for airspace awareness and safety. Improvements are required, however, including minimum broadcast power standards. Furthermore, the FAA should explore, with partner agencies like the Department of Justice (DOJ), enforcement actions for noncompliance.

SECTION 908—PART 107 WAIVER IMPROVEMENTS

Mandates improvements to the waiver process under Part 107 to ensure it is more efficient, transparent, and predictable.

This section was key, as lengthy and burdensome waiver reviews hinder commercial operations and discourage innovation. Many waiver requests are for common operations with well-understood risk profiles. These should be fast-tracked with past waiver data leveraged with the implementation of AI tools to improve the speed and predictability of approvals and reduce administrative burdens for industry and the FAA.

Since passage of P.L. 116–83, we have seen a significant acceleration in the FAA's approval of BVLOS waivers and exemptions, particularly for public safety operations, enabling broader adoption of drone technologies that are already contributing to crime reduction nationwide. This progress reflects the FAA and DOT's effective use of existing authorities. AUVSI commends Congress for the inclusion of Section 908 and the FAA for this positive shift, which demonstrates how regulatory flexibility can deliver real-world results.

Next Steps: The FAA should continue to develop and implement AI-powered automated workflows for routine waivers, publish clear approval criteria, and frequently engage stakeholders to continuously refine the process like the categorical exclusions (CATEXs) and summary grants already seen across other UAS operations.

SECTION 912—DRONE INFRASTRUCTURE INSPECTION GRANT (DIIG) PROGRAM

Establishes a grant program under DOT to support the use of drones for inspecting, repairing, and constructing critical infrastructure. Eligible recipients include state, tribal, and local governments, metropolitan planning organizations, or consortiums of such entities. Grants will help recipients use drones to increase operational efficiency, lower costs, enhance worker and community safety, reduce carbon emissions, and address other infrastructure priorities. DOT is required to report to Congress on the program's effectiveness within two (2) years of the first grant award. To date, funds have not been appropriated to allow DOT to make grants.

Drones can dramatically reduce inspection times and improve data accuracy, leading to more responsive and cost-effective infrastructure management. Replacing manual inspections with drones can reduce risks to workers, especially in hazardous or hard-to-reach environments. Further, by minimizing the need for heavy machinery and long field operations, drones can lower greenhouse gas emissions. The DIIG Program will be a winning program for drone manufacturers, drone operators, and governments that are in dire need of safer and more efficient infrastructure inspection—but Congress must fund the program to get it going now that it has been authorized.

Next Steps: AUVSI asks Congress to:

- Fund the program fully at $12 million for fiscal years 2026–2028 to maximize long-term cost savings and safety gains.
- Ensure timely program launch with early engagement of eligible entities and industry stakeholders.
- Promote UAS adoption in disaster-prone regions to bolster infrastructure resilience.

SECTION 913—DRONE EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE TRAINING GRANT PROGRAM

Directs the DOT to establish a Drone Education and Workforce Training Grant Program, authorizing $5 million annually from fiscal years 2025–2028 to support small UAS workforce development through grants to educational institutions.

As the UAS and AAM industries expand, there is a widening gap in skilled personnel, including maintenance technicians, data analysts, and systems engineers. Community colleges, universities, and credentialing organizations are poised to deliver UAS, AAM and autonomous operations-specific training at scale, if provided the necessary resources. This grant program provides a vital pathway for under-

served communities and young professionals to access high-paying, future-oriented jobs in aviation.

Next Steps: AUVSI asks Congress to hold the FAA to the intent of Section 913 and:

- Expedite program launch and deploy grant resources in close coordination with industry needs.
- Prioritize partnerships with institutions demonstrating inclusive access and strong job placement potential.

We urge Congress, through the House Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, to fully fund Section 913 to ensure the success of this critical workforce development initiative.

AUVSI commends this Committee for previously holding a hearing on this topic on July 10, 2024, titled, "*Eliminating Bottlenecks: Examining Opportunities to Recruit, Retain, and Engage Aviation Talent*," which AUVSI was honored to testify at.[4]

SECTION 914—DRONE WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAM STUDY

Directs the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to evaluate the effectiveness of the FAA's UAS Collegiate Training Initiative (CTI) program, originally authorized in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 FAA (P.L. 115–254). The program recognizes educational institutions that prepare students for careers in uncrewed aviation through technical instruction and industry engagement.

Over one hundred and forty (140) colleges and universities, including four (4) Minority Serving Institutions, currently participate in the CTI program, making it a critical pipeline for building a skilled, diverse UAS workforce. CTIs align closely with employer needs, engaging with FAA, industry, and public safety agencies to ensure students are prepared for UAS careers with a strong foundation in operational safety and regulatory compliance. Programs like AUVSI's Trusted Operator align with CTIs to deliver advanced, standardized training and safety credentials valued by employers, and have already produced more than one thousand six hundred (1,600) certified operators.[5]

Next Steps: AUVSI asks Congress to insist that the FAA and GAO:

- Engage CTI institutions and industry stakeholders during the GAO review to identify successes, gaps, and opportunities for program improvement.
- Use the study to establish metrics and best practices that can be scaled nationally, ensuring consistency in safety, skills, and workforce readiness.
- AUVSI also recommends Congress ensure sustained support and future investment in the UAS–CTI program as a foundational element of national workforce development and aviation innovation.

SECTION 922—KNOW BEFORE YOU FLY (KBYF)

Extends the KBYF initiative, which is now more important than ever. KBYF, established through a partnership between the FAA, AUVSI, the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA), and the Consumer Technology Association (CTA), is a Congressional Directive authorized by P.L. 115–254.[6] KBYF supports educational initiatives by providing drone kits and lesson plans to teachers for classroom and extracurricular use, fostering a culture of safety and innovation from a young age to ensure future generations are proficient in safe drone operations. KBYF-funded activities also focus on Public Service Announcements (PSAs), education, and outreach concerning safety topics such as drone registration, Remote ID compliance, the Recreational UAS Safety Test (TRUST), and drone participation in the Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS).

We are encouraged that P.L. 118–63 extends the KBYF program through 2028 and encourage Congress to appropriate full funding for the program to ensure that ongoing education, particularly as it relates to key issues like airspace awareness, drone registration, and Remote ID compliance are well understood and adhered to. Examples of recent KBYF PSAs include:

- Remote ID—Are You Compliant?[7]
- Remote ID—What is a FRIA?[8]

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[4] https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/07-10-2024__aviation__hearing__-__michael__robbins__-__testimony.pdf

[5] https://www.auvsi.org/trusted-operator

[6] https://knowbeforeyoufly.org/home

[7] https://youtu.be/5__a-5prhiBM?si=RhB6XRVSzt__w1Myu

[8] https://youtu.be/-__ijZAIHCnI?si=ecpWANj3xrNl3SGk

- How do I Register My Drone? [9]
- Register It—Don't Regret It [10]

SECTION 929—FIXED-SITE FACILITY UAS RESTRICTIONS

Section 2209 of the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act of 2016 (P.L. 114–190) mandated the establishment of a process allowing operators of fixed-site facilities—such as critical infrastructure, oil refineries, chemical plants, stadiums, and amusement parks—to petition the FAA to restrict or prohibit UAS operations in close proximity to their facilities. Despite the statutory requirement for the FAA to implement this process within one hundred and eighty (180) days of the Act's enactment, the agency has yet to even release a draft of the regulation nearly a decade later. Section 929 of P.L. 118–63 reinforces Congress' desire to see this provision from the 2016 law implemented with tight timelines for action, the first deadline of which has already been missed again, and direction to also include state prisons in the rulemaking.

This delay has led to a fragmented regulatory landscape, with various states enacting their own drone restrictions, resulting in a patchwork of laws that complicates compliance for drone operators and infrastructure stakeholders. AUVSI has worked to mitigate this patchwork of state rules through its Drone Prepared campaign at the state and local level.[11]

The Section 2209 rulemaking has been tied to the BVLOS rulemaking, and like the Part 108 NPRM, is currently at OIRA for review. We believe this rule may move from NPRM direct to Interim Final Rule (IFR), though that is still yet unconfirmed as of the timing of this hearing.

SECTION 932—THIRD-PARTY SERVICE APPROVALS

Directs the FAA to develop a streamlined process for approving third-party service providers that support UAS, AAM, and autonomous air operations, such as Remote ID providers, UAS Traffic Management (UTM) systems, ground-based detect and avoid (DAA), secure command and control (C2) links, and other critical digital infrastructure services. The statutory deadline for action on this section passed earlier this month on the one-year anniversary of the bill being signed into law.

The future of advanced aviation depends on a healthy ecosystem of third-party services to deliver core safety, navigation, and compliance functions. Today, many service providers stand ready to support operations, but FAA approval bottlenecks are stalling deployment. Meanwhile, other countries, including the PRC, are rapidly institutionalizing such ecosystems. Delayed action will cede leadership in this fast-evolving domain.

Next Steps: The FAA must publish a clear and accelerated approval process for third-party service providers, with transparent criteria, defined timelines, and ongoing industry consultation to ensure scalability and safety.

SECTION 934—OPERATIONS OVER HIGH SEAS

Directs the FAA to issue regulations enabling UAS operations over international waters, consistent with U.S. obligations under the Chicago Convention.

This is an issue AUVSI has been working on with the FAA for many years to resolve, as U.S.-based UAS operators need clear authority to conduct long-range and maritime operations in international airspace. Prior to a change in FAA posture and interpretation of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) rules, these operations were occurring safely and routinely from the U.S. over the High Seas. That changed when FAA overturned past precedent and ended operations over the High Seas for U.S.-based operators; however, not all nations made that same decision, putting U.S. companies at a competitive disadvantage.

Enabling operations over the High Seas supports critical missions including border patrol, maritime domain awareness, search and rescue, shipping logistics, offshore energy, and environmental monitoring. This is a high priority mission set for key U.S. government agencies, including the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), as well as for industry. By implementing Section 934, the U.S. can shape global norms and standards for UAS operations in international airspace, showcasing leadership and ensuring our priorities are at forefront of global aviation policy.

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[9] https://youtu.be/pkEjAamki80?si=MA0X8Plre1aRaPsw
[10] https://youtu.be/aOxe__e6hjXg?si=NM5DCV__7HNRTMrOP
[11] https://droneprepared.org/home

Next Steps: Congress should encourage the FAA to authorize UAS operations over the High Seas in circumstances where the aircraft already operate in U.S. sovereign airspace under existing approvals. This would be straightforward, especially considering that third-party risk in these areas can be demonstrated to be even lower than in domestic operations where flights are occurring safely and routinely now.

We are encouraged by the FAA's understanding of two important distinctions:

- First, between UAS certificated under a Special Airworthiness Certificate (SAC) and those not required to hold any certificate of airworthiness (such as those operating under Part 107 or a 44807 exemption).
- Second, between UAS used for commercial operations and those operating for experimental purposes, including research and development (R&D) and market surveys.

These distinctions present a meaningful opportunity for near-term progress. Specifically, we believe the FAA can approve UAS operations over the High Seas within U.S.-delegated Flight Information Regions (FIRs), airspace over the High Seas where the U.S. has been delegated responsibility by ICAO to provide air traffic control and flight information services, even though that airspace is outside U.S. territorial limits, under a Special Airworthiness Certificate—Experimental Category (SAC–EC) and Certificate of Waiver or Authorization (COA), consistent with the purpose authorized in those approvals. This step would:

- Directly benefit operators that currently are unable to operate over the High Seas out of the U.S. but can do so in some case out of other nations.
- Provide clear national security advantages.
- Demonstrate publicly that the FAA is taking a safe, incremental approach, setting an example for other nations.

AUVSI also wants to emphasize the critical importance of U.S. leadership at ICAO and in bilateral and multilateral efforts to develop comprehensive frameworks for UAS operations over the High Seas. Continued FAA engagement and leadership at the key ICAO panels, within relevant ICAO forums, and in collaboration with international partners at the ICAO Assembly is essential to progress.

SECTION 936—COVERED DRONE PROHIBITION

Prohibits DOT from entering into, renewing, or extending contracts or awarding grants involving the operation, procurement, or contracting of UAS, related systems, or counter-UAS technologies manufactured by covered foreign entities, including those from the PRC. These prohibitions apply across all DOT offices and programs.

UAS systems from covered foreign entities pose significant cybersecurity, data privacy, and supply chain risks.[12] Section 936 promotes the transition to trusted domestic or allied technology suppliers for critical infrastructure and aviation applications and supports broader federal efforts to reduce reliance on adversarial technology in sensitive government operations.

More can be done by DOT to better educate grant recipients on the ban on grant funds being used in connection with PRC drones, and associated replacement of existing covered drones that are owned and operated by the agency. The full implementation of this section will undoubtedly support these goals.

Next Steps: AUVSI asks Congress to uphold the intent of Section 936 and:

- Support DOT in identifying and transitioning to secure, U.S.-based or allied alternatives.
- Fund the authorized replacement program to ensure continued operational capability during the transition.
- Encourage transparency in exemption and waiver processes to prevent unintended loopholes.

SECTION 952—U.S. GLOBAL LEADERSHIP IN AAM

P.L. 118–63 expressed the sense of Congress that the United States should establish itself as a global leader in AAM, and directed the FAA to work collaboratively with manufacturers, prospective operators, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure the safe integration of AAM aircraft into the NAS.

Since the enactment of P.L. 118–63, over the last year the AAM industry has made significant progress. Leading companies have demonstrated that this technology is already capable of safely and effectively operating within the NAS, conducting real-world missions nationwide. These flights validate both the performance

[12] https://www.cisa.gov/news-events/news/release-cybersecurity-guidance-chinese-manufactured-uas-critical-infrastructure-owners-and-operators

and operational readiness of this emerging technology. Maintaining America's global leadership in aerospace requires that innovation be brought to market efficiently and safely.

In recent years, however, the FAA has taken on excessive, under resourced direct oversight responsibilities for aircraft certification, overwhelming the agency and causing significant delays for innovative U.S. companies in the drone, AAM, and autonomy industries. The FAA is well-intentioned but not resourced to adequately conduct an ever-expanding aircraft certification mission. The FAA does not have the personnel and expertise necessary to certify these new aircraft within a timeframe that aligns with industry needs for the United States to maintain global leadership. Companies building aircraft as diverse as sub fifty-five (55) pound drones to electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) craft to autonomous flight systems that enables aircraft to be remotely operated by a pilot on the ground are all funding and expanding a modernized and scalable scope of aviation (while maintaining safety), but are at risk of losing ground to international competitors because the FAA does not have the ability to certify the aircraft in a timely manner.

Next Steps: The FAA must work transparently with industry and adhere to clear certification timelines to ensure that AAM technologies are developed, produced, and deployed here in the United States—before our competitive advantage is lost to global rivals.

To keep pace with emerging technologies, the FAA should delegate routine approvals and compliance findings to respected industry experts and establish a right-sized enabling regulation for approval or certification rather than expanding its own workforce. With strong leadership and clear guardrails, enhanced delegation authority is essential for maintaining U.S. competitiveness. Confidence in the Organization Designation Authorization (ODA) Program must be fully restored and its use expanded for aircraft certification. By properly utilizing and expanding the ODA Program, the FAA can streamline its processes, improve efficiency, and significantly reduce taxpayer costs, ensuring timely certification without compromising safety and scaling the success of similar programs operated under the FAA designated test sites.

In addition, the FAA should continue with and build on its approach to airworthiness approvals for drones using the Criteria for Making Determinations (CMD) process under its Section 44807 authority. This process has proven to be a successful tool in addressing changes and updates to drone platforms.

SECTION 953—APPLICATION OF NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (NEPA) CATEXS FOR VERTIPORT PROJECTS

Requires the FAA to apply or establish CATEXs under NEPA to expedite environmental reviews for vertiports. This is key, as lengthy environmental reviews could stall critical AAM infrastructure projects. Just as certain road and rail projects benefit from CATEXs, vertiport development should similarly be streamlined to encourage sustainable, multimodal transportation. Vertiports will drive jobs and connectivity, especially in urban and underserved regions—delays in approvals undermine these benefits.

Next Steps: The FAA should publish clear NEPA guidance, identify common low impact vertiport scenarios suitable for CATEXs, and collaborate with local authorities to streamline siting and permitting. AUVSI's AAM Prepared initiative is designed to serve as a model for state and local officials.[13]

SECTION 955—RULES FOR OPERATION OF POWERED-LIFT AIRCRAFT

AUVSI applauds the FAA for finalizing the Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) to integrate powered-lift aircraft into the NAS, including establishing pilot certification and operational requirements. The SFAR established an initial path forward, but long-term performance-based rules are needed to support certification, operations, and training at scale—especially for autonomous and remotely piloted AAM aircraft. Accordingly, Section 955 also mandates long-term rulemaking and a dedicated ARC to guide future regulation of both piloted and autonomous powered-lift aircraft, including commercial and cargo operations. This is essential, as countries like the PRC are already deploying autonomous AAM systems. Accordingly, delayed regulatory pathways for powered-lift aircraft risks ceding U.S. leadership in this critical aviation sector, which we cannot allow to happen.

Next Steps: AUVSI asks Congress to urge the FAA to:

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[13] https://www.auvsi.org/aam-prepared

- Fully implement the Powered-Lift SFAR while accelerating the permanent rulemaking process informed by real-world experience, ICAO standards, and international best practices.
- Ensure the regulatory framework supports both near-term piloted operations and the transition to autonomy, including standards for remote pilot training and certification.

SECTION 1044—FAA UAS AND AAM R&D

Directs the FAA, in coordination with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and other federal agencies, to conduct and support R&D, testing, and demonstration activities to enable the safe integration of drones and AAM technologies into the NAS. Focus areas include BVLOS operations, C2 links, UTM, DAA systems, vehicle-to-vehicle standards, and the societal and environmental impacts of AAM and UAS. A report to Congress was required within nine (9) months of the law's enactment, which is now overdue by over one hundred (100) days, unless reported to Congress and not released publicly.

UAS and AAM technologies require robust risk-based evaluation frameworks to inform future FAA regulations, certification, and operational approvals. Research outputs are essential to updating current regulations and practices or establishing new ones that accommodate complex operations like autonomous BVLOS flight and large UAS integration. Section 1044 allows for concurrent deployment and research, ensuring that innovation is not delayed while safety research continues. Timely execution of Section 1044 will help align regulatory policy with technological advancement, ensuring the U.S. maintains global leadership in uncrewed and advanced aviation systems.

Next Steps: AUVSI urges the FAA to:

- Accelerate research in collaboration with industry and academia, especially in areas that inform near-term BVLOS, large UAS, and AAM certification guidance.
- Utilize ongoing research to update regulatory frameworks and operational standards without delaying deployment of safe, commercially ready technologies.
- Submit the required report to Congress and release it publicly, providing transparency on costs, progress, and plans for expanded operational approvals.

AIRSPACE MODERNIZATION, AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL INVESTMENTS FOR ADVANCED AVIATION, AND UAS DETECTION AND MITIGATION AUTHORITIES

Modern Skies

On a related subject not directly relevant to the topic of this hearing but nonetheless very important to the future of the NAS, AUVSI also offers our thoughts on the challenges and opportunities that exist on airspace modernization efforts.

AUVSI is a proud member of the Modern Skies Coalition, a group of more than fifty (50) wide-ranging aviation and aerospace industry organizations, which is highlighting the urgent need across the U.S. to hire and retain more air traffic controllers, upgrade FAA technology and infrastructure, and further modernize the NAS in a way that ensures an equitable and safe airspace for all.[14] We applaud this Committee, along with Secretary Duffy and Administrator Rocheleau, for moving boldly to upgrade the nation's dated air traffic control (ATC) system. AUVSI urges Congress to act swiftly in response to modernization plans by leveraging the budget reconciliation process, appropriations process, and standalone legislation as needed to keep this modernization effort on track.

Specific to the advanced aviation segment of the industry, AUVSI believes that advancements in technology integration and investments in modern low altitude awareness systems should be part of the near-term implementation plan. As noted, AAM aircraft have the potential to transform how people and goods move by enabling safer, faster, more efficient transportation within and between urban and rural areas. AAM aircraft can reduce congestion, cut commute times, and lower emissions—making transportation safer, cleaner, and more accessible. AAM also supports new economic opportunities by creating high-tech manufacturing jobs, expanding aviation services to underserved communities, and fostering innovation in energy storage, automation, and aerospace engineering. Yet, while we are confident that AAM aircraft can be integrated into the NAS now with existing ATC technology, to truly scale the industry to meet the promise of the technology, advancements in technology integration will be needed. Many AAM operators envision high-

[14] https://modernskies.com

frequency, low-altitude operations, often in dense urban areas, which existing ATC systems are not equipped to manage. Traditional airspace management relies on fixed routes and voice communications, but integrating AAM at scale demands dynamic, data-driven systems capable of real-time coordination across both crewed, and in the future, uncrewed aircraft. It also requires seamless transitions between low-altitude and controlled airspace, greater automation, and predictive tools to manage complex traffic patterns safely and efficiently. Without these improvements, AAM operations will remain constrained, and the broader societal and economic benefits of this next-generation aviation will go unrealized.

With respect to drones, we encourage Congress to ensure the FAA is implementing Section 911 of P.L. 118–63, which requires DOT to initiate a pilot program to supplement the department's oversight and inspection activities using UAS, including the inspection of ground-based aviation infrastructure, to increase employee safety, enhance data collection, improve the accuracy of inspections, and reduce the costs associated with such inspections. A great way to modernize our ATC system is to ensure the new infrastructure lasts longer and using drones for inspection is a proven method for cost reduction and improved safety.

Greater attention from the FAA should also be directed toward the development and approval of ground-based safety and security systems, which depend on robust physical and digital infrastructure, as noted above related to Section 932 implementation. This infrastructure is critical to supporting the growth of certain BVLOS drone and autonomous aircraft operations, as it will provide the ground locations for safe and secure launch and recovery, maintenance, temporary operations, and public safety missions such as drone as a first responder (DFR) programs. These designated areas will serve both routine and off-nominal needs, helping to ensure operational reliability and public trust. In sensitive or high-risk environments, ground-based sensors can provide critical situational awareness by detecting all aircraft operating in low-altitude airspace, regardless of whether they are broadcasting their position electronically.

As noted, drones deliver tremendous value to society—enhancing public safety, enabling efficient infrastructure inspection, and driving economic growth. They support first responders with real-time situational awareness during emergencies, aid in disaster recovery, and help maintain critical infrastructure like bridges, power lines, and pipelines. Across sectors such as agriculture, logistics, and media, drones are also creating high-skill jobs and fostering technological innovation. Yet, recent high-profile drone activity, such as the reported drone sights in New Jersey, which have now largely been discredited and demonstrated to be aircraft other than drones, has spotlighted significant gaps in low-altitude airspace awareness.[15] This surge in attention has underscored how low Remote ID compliance, limited investment in low altitude airspace awareness capabilities, and outdated regulations make it difficult for authorities to differentiate between authorized operations, negligent behavior, and potential threats. This uncertainty jeopardizes public trust and risks constraining a rapidly growing industry. Accordingly, AUVSI believes that innovation and security must advance in lockstep.

Our current ATC system is not designed for low altitude airspace awareness. Plainly speaking, most U.S. ground-based radar is good at tracking things at high altitude going very fast. Most UAS operate at low attitude at much lower speeds, which current FAA ATC infrastructure is not optimized for. Accordingly, as investments are made to upgrade ATC technologies, addressing this gap will require investment in modern, ground-based and networked surveillance systems—including radar, acoustic sensors, and cooperative data-sharing platforms—as well as support for digital infrastructure such as Remote ID, UTM, and real-time telemetry integration. Without a foundational layer of airspace awareness at low altitudes, efforts to enable safe, routine, and secure drone operations in the United States will remain constrained.

AUVSI's *Blueprint for Autonomy* calls on Congress and federal agencies to prioritize these investments as part of a national strategy for airspace modernization.[16] The Blueprint outlines the need to accelerate FAA's efforts to establish a regulatory and operational framework for digital airspace services, enable certification of airspace service providers, and fund infrastructure that supports safe and scalable integration of autonomous aircraft. Without decisive action, the U.S. risks falling behind global competitors that are already investing in the digital infrastructure needed to lead in autonomous aviation.

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[15] https://reason.com/2025/05/09/what-the-feds-knew-about-the-new-jersey-drone-scare/

[16] https://www.auvsi.org/sites/default/files/Blueprint-for-Autonomy-Building-Blocks-for-Our-Collective-Future.pdf

UAS Detection and Mitigation

The current UAS detection and mitigation framework presents many critical gaps that limit our ability to respond effectively to malicious or reckless drone activity, and, as noted, can lead to misunderstanding and falsely identified "drone sightings" due to a lack of low altitude airspace awareness. Many federal agencies, as well as all state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) law enforcement, and National Guard units, lack statutory authority to deploy and operate UAS detection and mitigation equipment. This absence of authority hampers timely response to drone threats at large public events, near critical infrastructure, or in emergency situations—gaps repeatedly identified by national security stakeholders, including the White House and the National Football League (NFL), which has emphasized the urgency of enabling local response during major sporting events and other significant gatherings.

Select federal agencies currently operating under temporary authorities granted by Section 124n of the fiscal year 2018 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) still lack permanent statutory authority. Without enduring authorization, these agencies face uncertainty in planning and operational continuity, limiting proactive threat mitigation efforts. As AUVSI has noted, sustained and predictable authority is essential to building an effective national UAS detection and mitigation architecture. Further, the FAA has also not yet taken sufficient steps to evaluate detection and mitigation technologies which offer a promising solution for identifying, and in very extreme cases, mitigating malicious drones in congested airspace, including without kinetic force. Testing such technologies is essential to determine their safety, effectiveness, and compatibility with the broader airspace ecosystem, and has been called for in White House and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) counter-drone strategy documents.

This Committee has previously worked on legislation to address these gaps, and AUVSI encourages work to continue to pass legislation in 2025 which moves the UAS detection and mitigation policy landscape forward in a meaningful way. Security, like safety, it not a barrier to integration—it is a foundation of it.

To address these challenges and seize opportunities, the United States must act decisively. Low altitude airspace awareness, air traffic control modernization, the incorporation of digital flight rules, and expanded UAS detection and mitigation authorities are all essential to building the ATC and NAS of the future and ensuring situational awareness at all altitudes.

CONCLUSION

P.L. 118–63, is a bold, comprehensive roadmap for the future of American aviation. Yet legislation alone is not enough. Congress must continue exercising strong, regular oversight to ensure that the FAA delivers on the mandates in a timely, transparent, and accountable manner.

AUVSI and our members stand ready to support the FAA, DOT, and this Committee in ensuring that the promise of UAS and AAM technologies is fully realized, and the U.S. maintains the gold standard of aviation safety and global aviation leadership. We are committed to a future where U.S. innovation leads the world—where safety, security, performance, and progress go hand in hand.

Thank you for your leadership and the opportunity to appear before you today.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, Mr. Robbins.

Captain Reven, you are recognized.

TESTIMONY OF CAPTAIN JODY REVEN, PRESIDENT, SOUTHWEST AIRLINES PILOTS ASSOCIATION

Mr. REVEN. Chairman Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify and share the perspective of more than 11,000 commercial airline pilots of Southwest Airlines Pilots Association.

My name is Jody Reven. I am a current 737 captain at Southwest Airlines and president of SWAPA. SWAPA is one of the largest independent pilot unions in the world and is the sole bargaining unit for the professional pilots of Southwest Airlines. SWAPA has been dedicated to aviation safety and security since 1978.

I am pleased to participate in today's discussion about the 2024 FAA reauthorization and air traffic systems, personnel, and aviation safety.

Let me begin by saying that the pilots of Southwest Airlines are heartbroken by the tragedy in DCA in January. We share our deepest condolences with the families and passengers of the crew of American 5342 and PAT 25.

We are committed to working with this committee, Congress, and all aviation stakeholders to ensure a similar tragedy never happens again. Safety and operational excellence are not guaranteed. Our system relies on industrywide collaboration.

SWAPA is proud to be a leader in safety data collection and analysis, risk identification and mitigation.

Southwest pilots are among the most productive in the world, operating over 4,000 flights a day to 120 domestic and international airports.

SWAPA partners with the FAA, labor partners, airlines, and the industry with one goal, and that is to keep the National Airspace System the safest and most efficient in the world. We carry 1.5 million passengers a year, and the SWAPA pilots depend on that safety.

SWAPA supports immediate actions to implement long-overdue technology upgrades, increase air traffic control staffing, and equip the FAA to recapitalize its systems and processes to meet the demands of an increasingly complex airspace.

The pilots of Southwest Airlines are industry leaders in incorporating technology that increases awareness and provides tools to help pilots and controllers make safe decisions. Unfortunately, the system's potential is not fully realized.

Recent high-profile issues have demonstrated that ATC facilities are not properly equipped or staffed. All aircraft, including rotorcraft and advanced air mobility systems, must properly be equipped with technology that provides ATC and other pilots with critical situational awareness to mitigate risks.

The incidents, including a recent one at Chicago Midway Airport where two Southwest pilots recognized safety and avoided a hazardous runway incursion, has reinforced that we have to have a minimum complement of two pilots in every cockpit.

In discussions with Secretary Duffy after this incident took place, we made the point, there is really no technological solution that can overcome the risks introduced by reducing the flight deck complement. The flight deck and ATC technology are support tools and never a replacement for experienced and rested, fully trained pilots and air traffic controllers and flight attendants.

SWAPA thanks the committee for the 5-year bipartisan FAA reauthorization bill that expedites the hiring of air traffic controllers, strengthens the aviation workforce while protecting experience requirements, and accelerates the development and deployment of advanced technologies, including the new surface safety technology, runway and taxi signage, and lighting systems.

We also want to thank this committee and the FAA for their commitment to increasing transparency and efficiency in the FAA's Office of Aerospace Medicine. Expanding the number of aerospace medical examiners and reducing the processing times for

aeromedical certificates are essential steps to maintaining a strong pipeline of well-trained and experienced pilots.

SWAPA fully supports this administration's budget, which funds the FAA's technology and facilities account at $4 billion. The system urgently needs sustained, robust budget requests and immediate infusion of funding.

SWAPA also applauds Chairman Graves' critical first step in moving forward with the $12.5 billion of funding.

We would like to thank this administration and this body for making our Nation's air traffic control system a priority. We look forward to working with the administration and Congress to make this a reality.

I look forward to answering your questions.

[Mr. Reven's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Captain Jody Reven, President, Southwest Airlines Pilots Association

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify and share the perspective of the more than 11,000 commercial airline pilots of the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association. My name is Jody Reven, and I am a current 737 Captain at Southwest Airlines and President of SWAPA.

SWAPA is one the largest independent pilot unions in the world and is the sole bargaining unit for the professional pilots of Southwest Airlines. SWAPA has been dedicated to aviation safety and security since 1978. We are grateful to offer our perspective on the 2024 FAA Reauthorization and air traffic systems, personnel, and aviation safety.

The pilots of Southwest Airlines are heartbroken by the tragedy at Reagan National Airport (DCA) in January. We share our deepest condolences with the families of the passengers and crew of American Airlines 5342 and PAT 25. We are committed to working with this committee, Congress and all aviation stakeholders to ensure a similar tragedy never happens again.

Safety and operational excellence are not guaranteed, and our system relies on industry-wide collaboration. SWAPA is proud to be a leader in safety data collection and analysis, risk identification, and mitigation. Southwest pilots are among the most productive in the world, operating over 4,000 flights each day to 120 domestic and international airports. SWAPA partners with the FAA, aviation labor, airlines, and the industry with one goal: to keep the National Airspace System the safest and most efficient in the world. The 1.5 million passengers that SWAPA pilots carry each year depend on it.

SWAPA supports immediate actions to implement the 2024 FAA Reauthorization and make long overdue technological upgrades, increase air traffic controller staffing, and equip FAA to recapitalize its systems and processes to meet the demands of increasingly complex airspace.

The pilots of Southwest Airlines are industry leaders in incorporating technology that increases situational awareness and provides tools to help pilots and controllers make safe decisions. Unfortunately, the system's potential is not fully realized.

To maintain and enhance the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System (NAS), we must make technological and infrastructure improvements now. This includes ongoing development of advanced automation tools, improved airport infrastructure, and modernized gate-to-gate operations that reduce delays and improve passenger flow. The evolving landscape of air travel—which includes commercial carriers, unmanned aerial systems (UAS), urban air mobility, and space flight—demands a NAS that can accommodate greater complexity safely and efficiently.

SWAPA has partnered with the FAA, aviation labor, and industry to advance air traffic modernization and recapitalization efforts. Key components of advanced technology—performance-based navigation, data communication, and Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS–B)—enhance pilot and controller decision-making and situational awareness. However, not all aircraft are equipped to fully utilize these technologies. A significant percentage of participating aircraft lack the navigation capabilities required to benefit from new procedures, forcing controllers

and pilots to use inefficient workarounds. Standardized equipage across the fleet is essential for the NAS to achieve its full potential.

Advanced navigation procedures, which improve efficiency and reduce noise and emissions, cannot become standard unless a greater portion of participating aircraft are properly equipped. Attempting to compensate with increased pilot workload undermines the intended safety and efficiency benefits. Moreover, there is no substitute for two fully trained, qualified and rested pilots on the flight deck. Automation should support pilots, not replace them. FAA studies confirm that roughly 20% of normal flights experience anomalies requiring human intervention, reinforcing the need for pilot redundancy.

Communication, Navigation, Surveillance/Air Traffic Management (CNS/ATM) integration is another critical area that FAA must accelerate. Enhanced communication, navigation, and surveillance systems increase situational awareness, reduce carbon emissions, support fuel savings, and reduce flight times. Tools like ADS–B, Airport Surface Detection Equipment, Model X (ASDE–X), and Airport Surface Surveillance Capability (ASSC) improve runway safety, yet these systems are not available at all airports. SWAPA urges the FAA to rapidly deploy surface safety systems at all airports with airline operations. We are encouraged by the Surface Awareness Initiative (SAI), which is now expanding to more airports.

Unfortunately, a large percentage of FAA's current equipment and communications systems are outdated and not up to the task of handling the current airspace system, let alone future demands. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently conducted an operational risk assessment of FAA's Air Traffic Organization (ATO). It found "that of FAA's 138 systems, 51 (37 percent) were unsustainable and 54 (39 percent) were potentially unsustainable." FAA must move faster to address these concerns.

SWAPA pilots operate at some of the most complex, mixed-use airports in the United States. Mixed-use airports have additional risk factors that must be considered. Airports that serve primarily air transport aircraft only do a good job with traffic flows, deconfliction and procedures. High density airports that serve air transport, light civil aircraft, business jets and helicopters are at the highest risk of another midair collision. The tragedy at Reagan National Airport must not be repeated, and SWAPA urges FAA to conduct an immediate safety assessment at Hollywood Burbank (BUR), Long Beach (LGB), and Orange County-John Wayne (SNA) airports to ensure processes and deconfliction procedures are adequate.

Terminal automation enhancements, such as Approach Runway Verification (ARV), improve alignment accuracy for arriving aircraft. We also commend efforts to install automation displays to boost controller situational awareness where radar coverage is limited.

We also support space-based ADS–B as a critical supplement to the ground network, offering real-time aircraft tracking over oceanic airspace. This will improve safety by eliminating delays in locating aircraft in emergencies and enhance surveillance where traditional ground infrastructure is not viable.

Data Comm, which allows digital messaging between pilots and controllers, reduces miscommunication and increases efficiency. However, implementation has been uneven. FAA should continue efforts to roll out Data Comm and ensure max participation of all aircraft.

Future NAS demands include real-time data exchange and improved integration of space launch operations. The FAA must also develop a robust Unmanned Traffic Management (UTM) system to manage growing low-altitude drone traffic. All aircraft—including rotorcraft and advanced air mobility systems—must be equipped with technology that gives ATC and other pilots critical situational awareness to help mitigate risks.

Recent high-profile incidents highlight that ATC facilities are inadequately equipped and staffed, and reinforce the fact that safety depends on experienced and well-rested pilots and controllers. These incidents, including at Chicago's Midway Airport where two Southwest Pilots recognized and safely avoided a hazardous runway incursion, reinforce that we must have a minimum of two pilots on the flight deck to ensure added awareness, expertise, and experience. There is no technological solution that can overcome the risks introduced by reducing the flight deck compliment. Flight deck and ATC technology are support tools and never a replacement for highly experienced, rested and fully trained pilots and controllers.

SWAPA thanks this committee and FAA for their commitment to increasing transparency and efficiency in the FAA's Office of Aerospace Medicine. Expanding the number of Aerospace Medical Examiners (AME) and reducing the processing times for aeromedical certificates are essential steps to maintaining a strong pipeline of well-trained and experienced pilots. Increasing transparency, improving pilot and AME education, and reducing wait-times for medical certifications is critical.

FAA has an opportunity to revolutionize the aeromedical process, and we encourage the creation of an Airman's Medical Portal where digital, secure delivery of required documents by both pilots and AMEs could increase efficiency for both pilots and the regulator.

Finally, despite congressional authorization for multiyear modernization projects, FAA budget projections often fall short, particularly in facilities and equipment funding. This underestimation, paired with frequent budget disruptions, hampers effective planning and implementation. While Congress has supported FAA funding through annual appropriations and reauthorization, budget shortfalls, funding disruptions and continuing resolutions have hampered progress. A stable, multi-year funding strategy is critical to maintaining our leadership in global aviation safety.

FAA must also provide realistic funding requests that recapitalize systems instead of maintaining legacy systems that are decades old in some cases. FAA must be accountable for meeting goals and implementation deadlines of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization.

SWAPA thanks this committee for the five-year bipartisan FAA reauthorization bill that expedites the hiring of Air Traffic Controllers, strengthens the aviation workforce while protecting experience requirements, and accelerates the development and deployment of advanced technologies including new surface safety technology and runway and taxiway signage and lighting systems. We appreciate the Committee's leadership in addressing near-miss incidents, enhancing runway safety, and advancing critical technologies. Notable improvements include the sustained operation of ASDE–X systems, and support for the Runway Safety Council and discretionary grant programs.

SWAPA fully supports the Administration's budget which funds the FAA's Technology and Facilities account at $4 billion. The system urgently needs sustained, robust budget requests and an immediate infusion of funding. SWAPA also applauds Chairman Graves' critical first step in moving forward on $12.5 billion of funding.

We applaud the administration and this body for making our nation's air traffic control system a priority, and we look forward to working with the Administration and Congress to make this a reality. The pilots of Southwest Airlines are committed to continuing our work with the Committee, FAA, and industry partners to preserve and improve the safety of our national airspace. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your continued focus on aviation safety and implementation of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, Captain.

Ms. Nelson, you are recognized.

TESTIMONY OF SARA NELSON, INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT, ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS—CWA, AFL–CIO

Ms. NELSON. Chair Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, and members of the subcommittee, my name is Sara Nelson. I am the president of the Association of Flight Attendants and a 30-year flight attendant myself, representing 55,000 flight attendants at 20 different airlines.

We are grateful for the opportunity to testify with the perspective of aviation's first responders and our sister unions representing other aviation workers.

The 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act was an incredibly important step forward in addressing decades of missed opportunities in shoring up our national aviation system. We applaud this committee on your efforts to get it passed and implemented, and we commend Secretary Duffy on his plans to supercharge staffing and modernization.

With deep respect for the families of PSA Flight 5342 and PAT 25 and lives lost in aviation tragedies in the past, we must always put safety and security first and redouble efforts to plug holes and mitigate risks in the system. Safety first, always.

But aviation is also critical for our entire economy and connectivity across the country and around the world.

My written testimony addresses our safety priorities in the law and the status of implementation, including important workplace safety that also affects passengers: contaminated recirculated air, temperature standards, ramp safety, radiation exposure, flight deck secondary barriers, standards for good jobs in aviation, mitigating cybersecurity risks, and addressing issues with disruptive passengers.

With the exception of the work by the National Academy of Sciences, much of this has been delayed or sidelined by this administration's actions to disband safety advisory committees and rulemaking committees.

But we are also very concerned that actions to fire probationary Federal workers, implement the Deferred Resignation Program, put in place hiring freezes, and put in jeopardy Federal worker pensions and healthcare with budget cuts that come from the bottom to give massive tax cuts to the rich who do not need it undermine the work of this committee and the diligent efforts of the Secretary to shore up our national aviation system.

The Wall Street Journal published an article recently that highlights concern over staff departures that could affect, quote, "the processing of medical clearances for pilots and air traffic controllers, work on runway safety, and the pace of licensing in the agency's commercial space offices."

We are also getting direct reports that the loss of employees that support the frontline safety professionals is taking a toll as HR and security screeners at the FAA have taken the Deferred Resignation Program, and this is slowing the hiring process, directly harming the focus of this committee and Secretary Duffy's plans to supercharge the changes we need.

Every worker at the FAA contributes to safety, whether deemed essential or not. The staffing cuts, disruptions, and distractions to the safety work of those who maintain and enforce the standards of our aviation system is simply unacceptable.

It is also important to recognize that other agencies contribute significantly to aviation safety, including the National Weather Service, NIOSH, and USAID. The cuts to these agencies and personnel are directly undermining efforts to get the information and structure we need to keep us safe in all airspace, on the ground around the world, and able to keep threats to our safety such as Ebola or other communicable disease from being spread throughout and by our aviation system. DOGE should not be allowed to undermine safety in the name of efficiency.

As aviation's first responders, we are charged with the safety, health, and security of all passengers and crew on our flight, and we promise our own families that we will come home safely, too. Aviation safety is personal to us, just as it is for tens of thousands of Federal workers who take part in helping us keep the promise to our families and our loved ones in our care.

It is the product of hundreds of thousands of workers, from engineers to mechanics to safety inspectors, security officers, pilots, gate agents, baggage handlers, flight attendants, and air traffic controllers, asking all day long, "Is it safe?"

We ask this question with the information we have from tragic moments of gaps in safety and promises to the memory of those we

have lost and the families with whom we grieve that it will never happen again. This starts with supporting a thorough investigation, continues with advocacy for reform, and lives forever in our repeated analysis all day long, "Is it safe?"

Aviation is the safest mode of transportation because we demand it, and we built a system that allows us to predict risk, produce redundancies, and fill holes to keep tragedy at bay. The FAA holds the statutory mandate to ensure the highest degree of aviation safety.

Our industry has been through many ups and downs. We cannot control the weather, but we can commit to steady funding; no shutdowns; the highest standards; broad recruitment, including the promise of good, steady jobs; and working with the people on the front lines who know the system best, how to fix it, what it lacks, and what it needs.

We applaud and support the subcommittee's focus on the safest, most efficient National Airspace System in the world. We are committed to fulfilling this mission with you and all of our partners in aviation safety, health, and security.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[Ms. Nelson's prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Sara Nelson, International President, Association of Flight Attendants—CWA, AFL–CIO

Chair Nehls, Ranking Member Cohen, Chair Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and members of the Subcommittee, we are grateful for the opportunity to testify with the perspective of aviation's first responders and our sister unions representing other aviation workers.

The safety and efficiency of our nation's Air Traffic Control (ATC) system are vitally important to Flight Attendants. We count on the highly trained experts who guide our flights through safe departure, cruise altitude, and landing. As aviation's first responders, we are charged with the safety, health, and security of all passengers and crew on our flight and we promise our own families that we will come home safely, too. Aviation safety is personal to us, just as it is for tens of thousands of federal workers who take part in helping us keep the promise to our families and loved ones in our care.

Aviation safety is the product of hundreds of thousands of workers—from engineers to mechanics to safety inspectors, security officers, pilots, gate agents, baggage handlers, flight attendants, and air traffic controllers—asking all day long, "Is it safe?" We ask this question with the information we have from tragic moments of gaps in safety and promises to the memory of those we've lost, and the families with whom we grieve, that it will never happen again. This starts with supporting a thorough investigation, continues with advocacy for reform, and lives forever in our repeated analysis all day long—"Is it safe?"

Aviation is the safest mode of transportation because we demand it, and we built a system that allows us to predict risk, produce redundancies, and fill holes to keep tragedy at bay. The FAA holds the statutory mandate to ensure the highest degree of aviation safety. We support the efforts of the House Aviation Subcommittee to provide critical oversight and demand for implementation of plans to recruit, train, and staff while modernizing and rebuilding the infrastructure necessary to fully staff and resource the experts on the frontlines who guide our planes safely. Earlier this year, our union signed a letter with groups representing the entire aviation industry stating, "we are aligned on not pursuing privatization of U.S. air traffic control services and believe it would be a distraction from these needed investments and reforms."

AS SAFETY PROFESSIONALS, OUR TRAINING TEACHES THAT THE FIRST RULE IN SAFETY IS TO REMOVE ALL DISTRACTIONS

Our industry has been through many ups and downs. We cannot control the weather, but we can commit to steady funding, no shutdowns, the highest standards, broad recruitment including: the promise of good, steady jobs, and working with the people on the frontlines who know the system best, how to fix it, what it lacks, and what it needs. The voices of the professionals represented by the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) and the Professional Aviation Safety Specialists (PASS) are critically important to plan and properly implement modernization, recruitment, and training. Listen to them and engage them consistently.

Aviation is safe due to the work of those you see on the frontlines and every person doing work in support of those jobs. FAA specialists are responsible for repairing air traffic control facilities and updating digital maps for pilots. Meteorologists provide critical reports that help navigate safe flights and avoid the dangers of turbulence that range in harm from air sickness and coffee burns to serious injury and even death. Recent layoffs and firings within our federal workforce introduce unnecessary risk and stress that distract from the mission of ensuring safe flight for both civil and military operations. Chaotic workplaces harm recruitment, training, and retention of critical personnel. The 35-day government shutdown of 2019 and all the short-term funding bills or continued resolutions harmed staffing, recruitment, training, retention, facility maintenance, and modernization. Do everything in your power to avoid these disruptions and distractions going forward.

We applaud and support this Subcommittee's focus on the safest, most efficient National Airspace System in the world. Safety and security don't just happen. It is the product of our collective mission to make it happen. We encourage you to continue to look to the experts on the frontlines, promote sufficient and steady funding to staff, maintain, and modernize our workplace. The Association of Flight Attendants-CWA is committed to fulfilling this mission with you and all our partners in aviation safety, health, and security.

AN UPDATE ON THE PRIORITIES OF OUR UNION IN THE 2024 FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2024

Sec. 321. Turbulence Related Injuries

By 2026, the FAA is instructed to review the recommendations by the NTSB to enact, as appropriate, these recommendations. Turbulence is a serious workplace safety threat for Flight Attendants with severe and long-term injuries. We do not have a status report on the progress of this instruction from Congress, and we urge this Committee to press the FAA to take action on this serious safety issue.

Sec. 322. Radiation Exposure

The bill directs the Secretary to work with the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a study on radiation exposure to crewmembers on board aircraft types across commercial aviation. While crews are classified as radiation workers, we are not offered any education or pregnancy protections. A Harvard Flight Attendant Health Study[1] has already indicated radiation contributes to a broad range of health impacts, including fertility and viability of pregnancies. There are examples from other countries where education and alerts are regulated, especially as it relates to pregnancy. We do not have any evidence of action on this section of the law, but we would welcome the NAS study into suitable radiation protections.

Sec. 323. Study on Impacts of Temperature In Aircraft Cabins

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has begun its mandated "1-year study on the health and safety impacts of unsafe cabin temperature with respect to passengers and crewmembers during each season in which the study is conducted." The kickoff meeting has been conducted, and the study findings are expected by May 2026, including "a short consensus report with its findings and conclusions, and, as appropriate, recommendations to inform strategies for monitoring, assessing, and managing passenger cabin air temperature levels and any associated health and safety impacts." This is progress in terms of implementing the direction of Congress, but our union continues to encourage regulators, airlines, airports, and unions to work together to implement temperature standards in order to mitigate the potential for serious risk to passengers and crew.

[1] https://www.fahealth.org/

Sec. 350. Secondary Cockpit Barriers

This issue is a longtime priority of our union. AFA is serving on the rulemaking committee, and a final report from the committee is expected to be issued to the FAA this month.

Sec. 353. Ramp Safety Language

The FAA Reauthorization of 2024 includes a Call-to-Action safety review of ramp worker safety, which requires the FAA to assess safety on the ramp and report to Congress on results and any recommendations for action. As a crucial first step, the FAA recently convened an aviation stakeholder forum, the Ramp Safety Forum, to foster collaboration and enhance safety practices within the industry.

While this initial convening was positive, ongoing engagement and more substantive action are necessary, particularly with labor representatives and frontline workers. Significant training challenges persist for ramp workers, including: insufficient investment in training, high turnover, rapid onboarding, and redundant and ineffective recurrent training.

Moving forward, the FAA must proactively address the inherent hazards faced by ramp workers and continue to convene diverse stakeholders for further dialogue and action. Key areas for immediate attention include:

- Reassess staffing: One critical role per tower agent
- Conduct risk assessment on multitasking in tower operations
- Review ramp task scheduling for realistic task times
- Avoid overlapping assignments and rushed transitions
- Provide more extensive training for allocators
- Balance safety and efficiency through collaboration with safety teams and management

Sec. 362. Cabin Air Safety

This section of the law requires the FAA to finish the study in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act on bleed air in six months, develop a reporting system for smoke or fume events onboard commercial aircraft within 180 days, and by 2027, conduct a study and issue recommendations pertaining to cabin air quality and any risk of, and potential for, persistent and accidental fume or smoke events onboard a passenger-carrying aircraft operating. Finally, the law instructs the FAA to do a rulemaking one year after the study to address the safety risks identified.

The urgency of moving forward on this language cannot be understated, and to date, we have not seen movement on this issue. The safety risks are already well defined. Crews and passengers continue to experience the effects of contaminated bleed air with symptoms that range from fatigue, headaches, and nausea to long-term cognitive impacts that have ended careers and permanently altered health and quality of life. We look forward to working with members of Congress and this Subcommittee, who also are exposed to re-circulated cabin air when commuting to work, to ensure the air we breathe is safe.

Sec. 365. Modernization and Improvements to Aircraft Evacuation

Our aircraft cabins have become tighter than ever with smaller and closer seats, reduced staffing, and new complications including electronics, cords, and lithium-ion batteries. Currently, the standards for certification of aircraft configuration are determined based on out-of-date data. The Administrator was directed to conduct a study on "improvements to the safety and efficiency of evacuation standards for manufacturers and carriers." We expect the report from the National Academy of Sciences soon. But we encourage this Subcommittee to do more on this issue and urge the FAA to update certification standards for safe evacuation of all of the variety of people who fly on our planes.

Sec. 367. Mandated contents of Emergency Medical Kit (EMK)

This section directed the FAA to issue a notice of proposed rulemaking to update the EMK contents and training necessary for crews. A working group started to address this issue, but DOGE disbanded it. As aviation's first responders, charged with the safety, health, and security of those in our care, we cannot overstate how concerning this is. Without the proper tools to save lives in the air, passengers and crew are at risk due to the time it takes to safely get to ground for medical response. We urge this Subcommittee to follow up on this and ensure DOGE is not in the name of "efficiency" undermining safety.

Sec. 395. Aviation Cybersecurity

Not later than one year after passage of the bill, the Administrator shall convene an aviation rulemaking committee on civil aircraft cybersecurity. We do not have an update on the status of this rulemaking, nor actions to begin efforts on this sec-

tion of the law. Our union emphasizes the importance of identifying potential threats and establishing standards to mitigate them.

Sec. 421. Crewmember Pumping Guidance

Workers across the economy have the right to express milk at work with the means and privacy to do so. Crewmembers, Flight Attendants, and Pilots do not have the same assurances. Clear guidelines are necessary to ensure safety of flight and proper crew coordination. The FAA has issued guidance,[2] but it does not provide guidance for crews working in the cabin, with the exception that "pumping crewmembers can use cloth nursing covers to maintain some privacy and that 'wearable technology' exists." This does nothing to address the crew coordination, privacy, health insurance coverage for "wearable technology," or suggested location for pumping. We are concerned this does not address the concerns related to the health of the infant or crewmember.

Sec. 427. Crewmember Self-Defense Training

Since September 11, 2001, the importance of crew member self-defense training has been identified as critical for national security, and the need for these trained skills has only become more acute as crews have experienced violent attacks from disruptive passengers. The Federal Air Marshals conduct a voluntary program, with authorization and funding appropriated by Congress. The 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act included instructions to create clear standards for the training and more readily available and accessible to crew members, including lodging accommodations which removes an economic barrier to attending the training. However, this administration disbanded multiple federal advisory committees, including the ASAC. The participants included stakeholders from across the industry with three decades of experience in safety and security advisory by seasoned participants. This is just one small example of the security work not taking place due to the dismantling of this committee. And it may be one small example, but it is no small thing to aviation's first responders who have experienced broken limbs, knocked out teeth, head trauma, and persistent threats with nowhere to turn in our confined workspace. DHS is now evaluating whether to form a new ASAC committee, and we urge this Subcommittee to press DHS for swift reinstatement with representation from stakeholders across aviation, as was the case for more than three decades.

Sec. 432. Deterring Crewmember Interference

The law called for the Administrator to convene a task force within 120 days "to develop voluntary standards and best practices relating to suspected violations of the law against interfering with a crew member." After the bill's passage, the FAA Administrator determined that it would be best to conduct this work through the TSA Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC). The TSA Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) had been tasked to work on this issue, but again, this administration disbanded the committee. In the meantime, this section of the law remains in limbo as well.

Sec. 434 and 435. Employee Assault Prevention and Response Plan Standards

Within 90 days, the FAA was directed to provide a briefing to Congress on the submission of practices by each carrier. Within 180 days, passenger carriers are directed to work with labor unions representing frontline personnel on a formal policy with respect to sexual assault or harassment incidents. It is unclear whether there has been any progress on this direction from Congress.

Sec. 438. Airport Service Workforce Analysis—GJGA Language

Airport service workers are the foundation of our air travel system. The very people who keep our world moving are, too often, the very same workers who are denied a decent wage and benefits like paid time off or affordable healthcare, leaving them unable to support their families or pay the bills. Because of these conditions, turnover remains a huge concern in this workforce. That's why across labor, we support standards like the previously introduced "Good Jobs for Good Airports" legislation, which would ensure every aviation worker is paid a fair wage with health care and paid time off, including airport service workers. These standards result in lower turnover and more highly trained aviation workers, which in turn make airports safer for everyone.

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[2] https://www.faa.gov/other__visit/aviation__industry/airline__operators/airline__safety/info/all__infos/InFO25001.pdf

ATC INFRASTRUCTURE AND STAFFING WARNINGS AT NEWARK WERE OVERDUE

A month ago, stories broke about the failure of equipment at Philly TRACON, significantly affecting commercial travel at Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR). These failures immediately sparked public concern about aviation safety at Newark, as passengers and crews experienced significant delays and cancellations. Our union released the following statement on May 2, 2025:

> "This afternoon a story broke about safety concerns related to the air traffic at Newark. NATCA, the air traffic controllers' union, has warned for decades that infrastructure must be rebuilt and modernized. *Our air traffic controllers are the best in the world and they are making sure aviation stays safe*. We support every effort to secure the funding necessary to staff up and provide the resources that are a decade overdue for our air traffic controllers to be able to do their jobs. We call on all airlines operating out of Newark to cut planned flights at an equal percentage across airlines in order to support this work, aviation safety, and our jobs. Working together we can solve the problem faster and keep everyone safe."

It is worth noting that our air traffic controllers also manage Teterboro Airport (TEB), Morristown Municipal Airport (MMU), Essex County Airport (CDW), Linden Airport (LDJ), which should be part of the conversation about capacity controls while Secretary Duffy works with all constituencies on short term and long term plans to fix and modernize equipment and infrastructure, and support the actions necessary to increase to staffing.

HELP STOP HARMFUL CUTS AND DISTRACTIONS FROM SAFETY

DOGE Cuts Put Accurate Weather Forecasts at Risk

The National Weather Service (NWS) oversees a network of offices that provide forecasts, advisories, and warnings in support of aviation safety across the United States and its territories. Weather Forecast Offices, with 122 locations across the US, issue public warnings for things like thunderstorms and provide the Terminal Aerodrome Forecast (TAF) for airports.

These reports forecast meteorological conditions within a 5-mile radius of an airport over a 24- to 30-hour timeframe. These takeoff and landing condition forecasts are essential for safety because they predict low clouds, visibility, wind, low-level wind shear, and weather. This information is essential to set appropriate fuel levels, create flight plans, and mitigate takeoff and landing risks. Additionally, the Aviation Weather Center in Kansas City issues ICAO products across the US for en-route forecasts. This helps pilots and air traffic controllers mitigate turbulence, icing, and storms that aircraft may encounter. NWS meteorologists are co-located at the Air Traffic Control System Command Center (ATCSCC) and 21 Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCC) across the country. They notify the FAA of hazards that may impact flights in the ARTCC airspace or on the ground. When conditions are dangerous, they can even work side by side with a controller to tell them when it's safe to move traffic around hazards like thunderstorms. These positions are supposed to be staffed 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, but cutbacks and firings led by Elon Musk and DOGE have created major staffing problems across the system.

Drastic cuts and hiring freezes at NWS threaten aviation safety. In the last few months, 600 workers were let go or took early retirements—that's 12 percent of NWS staff. These sudden and draconian cutbacks undermine the accuracy of forecasts and the agency's ability to share this essential information to the American public. The NWS Center Weather Service Unit in Oakland, California is now down to one meteorologist rather than the four that are needed to fully staff the facility, and the Trump Administration's hiring freeze means they can't bring on new staff to fix the problem. At the System Command Center in Warrenton, Virginia, there is one meteorologist vacancy out of a six-person staff. The NWS Alaska Center Weather Service Unit is down to three Weather Service staff, which puts significant pressure across a state where general aviation is extremely important to daily travel by residents and tourists alike. The NWS Boston Center Weather Service Unit has lost a manager and a meteorologist, leaving two meteorologists to staff the facility 16 hours a day, 7 days a week. To its credit, the NWS has developed temporary workarounds, including having nearby Center Weather Service Unit staff support shorthanded facilities. Still, these are just short-term patches that do not offer a reliable solution for the industry.

I urge members of this Subcommittee to identify where there are open positions in the aviation system. Are the ARTCCs and the System Command Center all fully staffed by NWS staff? What's the status of NWS hiring for these positions? We need

to be fully briefed on whether airline workers are getting the essential weather information they need. And it's also time to lift the draconian hiring freeze so that NWS can ensure that flight crews and passengers are protected by the most up-to-date and accurate forecasts possible.

CUTS TO PUBLIC AND OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH INFRASTRUCTURE HERE AND ABROAD PUT FLIGHT ATTENDANTS AND OTHER CRITICAL WORKERS AT RISK

National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)

The AFA is gravely concerned about the degradation of our nation's public health infrastructure resulting from the Administration's cost-cutting efforts. The Administration's attempt to effectively eliminate the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) devalues our nation's workers. These cuts put the health and safety of flight attendants and other essential workers at risk.

And why must these workers bear this risk? To pay for more tax cuts for the ultra-rich. This shift away from the needs of working people to benefit the few is unconscionable. It is tearing at the social fabric of our country and must stop.

Here is a sample of some of the programs that have been eliminated or effectively gutted through staffing cuts:

- NIOSH's Health Hazard Evaluation (HHE) program gives employers and workers an opportunity to request technical assistance to investigate and understand complex health hazards in the workplace. NIOSH and this program have helped Flight Attendants by detecting toxic chemicals in uniforms and evaluating hazards like noise levels and jet fumes in aircraft cabins. NIOSH has studied prolonged radiation exposure to flight crews and assisted the industry in addressing ergonomic issues. The HHE program relies on world-class subject matter experts and testing facilities that can address a range of issues. Most of these experts and facilities currently sit idle.
- The Administration is eliminating NIOSH programs that have provided the airline industry with critical guidance on preventing the spread of infectious disease, including pathogens like the measles that present a public health risk, as well as chemical and heat hazards.
- Flight Attendants, who have above-average injury rates, benefit from NIOSH's Musculoskeletal Health Program, which helps the industry reduce soft-tissue injuries. The Center for Work and Fatigue Research has helped our union better understand and address health and safety risks from non-standard work schedules common in the airline industry. These programs are no longer staffed.
- This Administration has also abandoned programs of applied science that have demonstrably improved the lives of workers in high-hazard industries such as farming, commercial fishing, and oil and gas extraction. These programs must be reinstated.
- The country will also lose its pipeline of future occupational health experts if the Administration proceeds with the elimination of NIOSH's 18 Education and Research Centers, which train graduate and post-graduate students and conduct critical research and occupational health and safety. Recent areas of research include safety during hurricane recovery, oil spill cleanup, and protecting healthcare workers during outbreaks like Ebola and influenza.

There are some programs that have been partially reinstated under public pressure, but their future remains unclear:

- NIOSH administers the Firefighters Cancer Registry. It was shocking to hear that the Administration would no longer collect health and occupational information to help us understand cancer risks among firefighters, especially at a time when firefighter response to wildland and wildland-urban interface fires is at an all-time high.
- Coal miners rely on NIOSH research and their extensive surveillance programs to support miners' health. While some of the staff doing this critical work has been recalled to work, the future of some of this work is also unclear. We owe it to the nation's miners to fully ensure their health and safety through continued research by NIOSH to improve the lives of both retired and working miners.
- Another program with an unclear future is the World Trade Center Program, monitoring and addressing occupational diseases of first responders and construction workers who were at Ground Zero, supporting our nation's recovery from the attacks on 9/11. The Administration needs to be transparent with the country in assuring that the work we owe these heroes will continue.

USAID

The health and safety risks to Flight Attendants are not limited to our borders. A substantial number of AFA's members work internationally. Working with public health agencies, airlines are one of the first lines of defense in this country in ensuring the containment of highly contagious pathogens carried by international travelers.

However, with the Administration's decision to effectively eliminate the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), nations throughout the world are losing the capacity for[3] basic public health functions like health surveillance programs, early detection and containment of infectious disease like Ebola, and even basic public health prevention like vaccination programs and elimination of waterborne illnesses.

This is a tragedy for the world. By one estimate from researchers at Boston University School of Public Health, these cuts have already resulted in over 99,000 adult deaths and over 200,000 child deaths globally. In addition to mourning this loss of life, we are deeply concerned that our nation will be repaid for the shortsightedness of eliminating these programs with more and more incidents of dangerous diseases on our aircraft, in our airports, and eventually in our communities. It is simply a matter of time before we feel the implications of this tragic mistake.

In eliminating USAID, the Administration has eliminated[4]:

- A 50-nation network of surveillance to detect deadly diseases such as bird flu and swine fever
- An emergency response system that could respond to deadly disease outbreaks in 48 hours
- Programs that reduced or controlled infections from tuberculosis and measles, both of which are now more likely to enter our country through airports of entry.

Fighting Ebola, or measles, or Mpox overseas is not only a moral responsibility, but also a strategic, smart approach that benefits Americans by reducing the risk of future deadly outbreaks and pandemics here at home. On behalf of more than 50,000 AFA Flight Attendants, I urge Congress and the Administration to act immediately to restore funding and staffing to NIOSH and USAID, in particular its critical life-saving and public health programs.

Stop Staffing Cuts and Threats to Federal Worker Benefits

The WSJ published an article recently that highlights an FAA presentation expressing concern over staff departures that could affect "the processing of medical clearances for pilots and air-traffic controllers, work on runway safety, and the pace of licensing in the agency's commercial-space offices."[5] Every worker at the FAA contributes to safety, whether deemed "essential" or not. The staffing cuts, disruptions, and distractions to the safety work of those who maintain and enforce the standards of our aviation system is simply unacceptable. We know this Subcommittee is committed to safety and a thriving aviation industry. We applaud the passage of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act, and encourage the effort that went into passage to flow directly to the efforts that are necessary today to keep our aviation system the safest in the world.

Closing

It is an honor to work with each of you, to have you fly with us in our workplace, to protect the system that serves as the backbone of our economy, and to work with the urgency necessary to honor the lives lost like those on PSA Flight 5342. It is in their name, and the names of those we will keep from saying by our diligent actions together, that we recommit ourselves to aviation safety every day. Thank you.

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[3] https://www.bu.edu/sph/news/articles/2025/tracking-anticipated-deaths-from-usaid-funding-cuts/; https://www.impactcounter.com/dashboard?view=table&sort=interval__minutes&order=asc

[4] Testimony of Dr. Atul Gawande, former Assistant Administrator of Global Health, USAID, Senate Roundtable on the Dangerous Consequences of Funding Cuts to U.S. Global Health Programs (April 1, 2025).

[5] https://www.wsj.com/business/airlines/faa-staff-shortages-challenge, Andrew Tangel, May 28, 2025

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, Ms. Nelson.

And thank you all for your testimony.

We will now turn to questions for the panel. I will recognize myself.

Mr. Bolen, certification delays of business aircraft. Business aircraft have long been a concern, particularly with the introduction of new technologies such as advanced air mobility.

Do you believe that the FAA is progressing in modernizing and streamlining its certification process, as required in our reauthorization of 2024?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, as you know, the reauthorization bill did require some certification reforms, helped digitize a lot of the work that is being done. And, certainly, the signing of the SFAR last October provided the enabling regulation to be able to start those operations.

I think we are very interested in seeing the first advanced air mobility aircraft certified potentially as early as the end of this year, maybe early next year, and beginning operations. A number of very exciting demonstration programs have been launched, and I think we feel very encouraged about ushering in this new era of aviation.

Mr. NEHLS. Have the delays impacted innovation in your sector?

Mr. BOLEN. I think there is always a critical balance when technologies are coming forward, but I think there is a growing recognition that innovation and technology makes us safer and that safety delayed is not a way for us to promote safety. So I think we are on track on focusing on making these things happen.

Mr. NEHLS. Very well.

Last month, I introduced the Supersonic Aviation Modernization Act, which I firmly believe will foster aviation innovation across America.

As you know, my bill would direct the FAA to revise and issue regulations that permit civil supersonic flights in the national airspace, so as long as no boom, no supersonic boom, breaks grandma's window on the ground, right? It won't reach the ground.

Could you explain why it is critically important for the FAA to revise the current 1973—you weren't even born in 1973, were you [to Representative Cohen]?

Mr. COHEN. I was a graduate.

Mr. BOLEN. Well, the——

Mr. NEHLS [interrupting]. That prohibits nonmilitary—I mean, this is——

Mr. BOLEN [interposing]. Right.

Mr. NEHLS [continuing]. We are talking about nonmilitary flights——

Mr. BOLEN [interposing]. Right.

Mr. NEHLS [continuing]. Over the United States.

Mr. BOLEN. Yes. The 1973 law, as you know, was based on the technology that was understood at that time.

Mr. NEHLS. Sure.

Mr. BOLEN. And huge amounts of research and development by private companies, by NASA and others have really changed that technology.

Mr. NEHLS. Yes.

Mr. BOLEN. You are well aware of the Boom flight that has been able to go without creating that type of sonic boom that was so prevalent in 1973.

We all know that what aircraft do is connect people. And they are time machines. And so I think our advancements through the years have been focused on flying farther, flying safer, flying faster, and flying more sustainably.

Mr. NEHLS. I firmly believe that by the FAA establishing a clear, science- and evidence-based framework for civil supersonic aviation, while ensuring no noise, safety, or environmental concerns, we will allow American industry to innovate and maintain leadership in global aviation policy.

I appreciate NBAA's support of my legislation, so thank you for that. I look forward to working with you to get this legislation through Congress.

Ms. Nelson, 55,000 flight attendants over 20 airlines. I was reviewing your written testimony. I think there are several sections, probably 12, 14 of them, that are priorities for your union.

Section 321 deals with turbulence-related injuries.

I think section 323 deals with the temperature. I think that is in progress. The FAA is working on that.

The cockpit secondary barriers, I believe that is in progress as well.

Section 432, the crewmember interference, I think that is a concern for everybody.

I mean, what we are seeing with section 434, too, with employee assaults, that is complete, is my understanding. That section is complete, with dealing with the employee assault precautions.

Is that not in—how are you doing? How do you feel the FAA is responding to some of the priorities that you have that were in our FAA reauthorization?

Ms. NELSON. So we have issues here, because the issues that deal with security were generally referred to ASAC, which was the committee that was disbanded. It had been in place since the Pan Am flight crash of over 30 years ago.

Mr. NEHLS. Mm-hmm.

Ms. NELSON. And so, much of that work around the security issues has been set aside because that committee is no longer in place.

Now, we understand that there are efforts to reestablish it. We are looking forward to that very much. And we hope that it will continue to be representative from across the entire aviation industry. We think it was a very important committee that provided a lot of important work for our security.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you. Thank you so much.

I will now recognize the ranking member for 5 minutes.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Nelson, I will continue with you. How do you feel about this proposal or this concern of the safety of flight attendants and interactions with unruly passengers being sent to a committee that hasn't [sic] existed since Pan American airlines was around, which I recall?

Ms. NELSON. I hope that I heard you correctly, but this is a concern. We need real focus on disruptive passengers.

And as our flights are fuller than ever and our staffing is at minimums, it is very, very difficult for flight attendants to get to the source of a conflict and deescalate with our skills. Oftentimes that rises up, and we have had concussions and broken teeth and all kinds of problems because we don't have enough focus on trying to keep those disruptive passengers from getting back on our planes again and coordinating that information across the industry.

Mr. COHEN. I don't recall these incidents occurring more than 5, 6, 7, 8 years ago. Has it been more of a—is it a more modern problem, current problem, than in the past?

Ms. NELSON. In fairness, Congressman, we were working on issues of air rage in the 1990s, and we got some of those first fines and jail time in the bill in 2000.

But we are seeing this at a rate that we have never seen before. So you are correct that we are seeing this at a higher rate.

Part of that has to do with the conditions on our planes, that people are jammed in together. There are a lot more bodies; there is a lot less space to move around. People come a little upset because they have smaller seats, no place to put their bags, and sometimes their bags are taken from them.

And so there are a lot of stressors that are added to our environment. You add in, in addition to that, alcohol, and it is a recipe for real problems up in the air and even during the boarding process.

Mr. COHEN. Let me follow up on the idea of smaller seats and less room to move and being crammed in: the EVAC Act, which is something I have been working on for years and has passed, but it has never quite been implemented because they don't give a representative census of the population of an aircraft. Seniors and people with disabilities and youngsters aren't included.

How do you feel like the FAA is doing on getting that reform to see to it that the test that they do to see if the 90-second rule can apply is being carried forth?

Ms. NELSON. We are working on getting the study, but this has been a direction from the 2018 bill that we are trying to continue to press the FAA to move on. And we are still working with outdated data in certifying evacuation standards for the aircraft. And that is leading to cabins that are jampacked and conditions that do not recognize, as you said, the population that we have today.

We have a larger population; people are generally larger today. We have people—our airplanes are open to everyone, so we have passengers with disabilities, we have young children. And none of this is factored in in the evacuation standards.

So both the human factors and also the size of the seats and how close they are together, that is not taken into consideration for those evacuation standards today, and that needs desperately to be updated.

Mr. COHEN. Do flight attendants get any training on people with specific and medical conditions, like people with autism, and how you would deal with them in a situation where you had a crash?

Ms. NELSON. Are we getting training on that?

Mr. COHEN. Yes.

Ms. NELSON. Not directly on that. It is mentioned in our training, but we do not have direct and specific training on that.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you very much.

Captain Reven, your testimony highlights the need to modernize the system. What should the FAA do first to tackle the problems in the system and to reduce risks in the National Airspace System?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Ranking Member Cohen.

I think what we are doing is a very good approach. I like what was in the bill.

One of the biggest things that we talk about is one level of safety and one level of security so that our traveling public is safe. And we were pleased to see in the bill removal of the loophole that allowed part 135 operators to sell 121 tickets.

Also, I think what we have done in security and safety with the ground markings, with the ADS–B, with RAAS, it is a good first step.

Mr. COHEN. My time is about out. I do want to ask you this. As a pilot, do you see any problems in the relationship with pilots and co-pilots in guiding an airplane safely? Are there any interactions that you find to be difficult? Or is that dealt with in training, too?

Mr. REVEN. So I think we deal with three or four generations sometimes in a seniority list, and we work through those issues. We are trained very well. We have yearly discussions about that. Cockpit resource management is of the upmost.

We have professional aviators out there that—the Midway incident is a great teamwork type of example, where a captain is very focused on landing on a short runway and the first officer is watching an evolving situation. Frankly, jumped in and saved the day. So they worked well together up there.

Regardless, we have a very standardized procedure so that every person that shows up and flies with me in the right seat as the singular model on what he is thinking is going to take place in the cockpit, how we run checklists, et cetera. So, not a lot of problems.

Mr. COHEN. So you, as a 737 pilot, realize that pilots and co-pilots do work together and that is not a problem in aviation.

Mr. REVEN. Absolutely true. We absolutely——

Mr. COHEN [interrupting]. Thank you.

Mr. REVEN [continuing]. Rely on each other.

Mr. COHEN. If the Chair would give me just one more second or minute.

Mr. Robbins, you are the president of Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International. Now, as he mentioned [indicating Representative Nehls], 1973, I was around; 1973, we wouldn't have had an Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International, I don't think.

Mr. ROBBINS. It was the year we were founded, actually.

Mr. COHEN. Was it?

Mr. ROBBINS. Yes.

Mr. COHEN. The only thing I remember then was, you would put some water in a cylinder and you would pull it back and it flew. And that was in your yard. You have come a long way.

Mr. ROBBINS. We have.

Mr. COHEN. Ukraine had a big week with drones. Are drones becoming the most significant military vehicle for the future in this world? And do you have members in your organization that are working on drones as weapons?

Mr. ROBBINS. Yes, sir. Thank you very much for that question.

I believe that we do have a number of members—we are both a commercial and defense trade association—we do have a number of our member companies that are working on various forms of military UAVs, whether that is for ISR or weaponization or contested logistics.

So, certainly, the future of military is autonomous. Ultimately, robots don't bleed. And it has been clear from the higher echelons throughout the Department of Defense that moving towards more autonomous systems not only extends our operational reach, it also ensures we are protecting our warfighters.

So, yes, the future of our military is autonomous, sir.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, sir.

And thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Mr. Perry for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Pleasance, I am going to turn to you for some questions. Just to lead up to them, as you note in your testimony, "For 86 years, AOPA has stayed true to its mission of protecting the freedom to fly . . . Guiding, protecting, and promoting this uniquely American experience, so we can pass it along, better than we received it, to the next generation of aviators."

And with that in mind, I think now is probably the most important time for AOPA's mission and its criticality. As I describe, left-wing activists seeking to destroy the ability of folks in the United States to travel as they see fit and to exercise their freedom in private aviation.

And with that in mind, there are efforts being made regarding aviation fuel, to seek to make it prohibitively expensive in this mindless pursuit for sustainable aviation fuels.

We have not only attempted to subsidize SAFs—that goes back to the Obama administration. We have done that. Among other things, it establishes a Government-created market for ethanol under the guise of environmentalism. And then, of course, we have to have the jobs that—they just have to continue for the new market that was created, this Soviet-style program.

The tax credits are $1.25 per gallon, up to a $1.75. And after this January, now we have a production tax credit for 35 cents a gallon as the base, up to a $1.75.

And beyond that grift, there is another grift in the IRA, which created a $250 million competitive grant program for the blending, storage, transportation, et cetera, of FAST, Fueling Aviation's Sustainable Transition.

We have a long history and a sordid history of subsidies. But even after all this, it accounts for 0.3 percent—0.3 percent. And the goal by 2030 is 3 billion gallons, of which we are about 93 million gallons. We are far, far from that.

And with that in mind, the cost associated, production cost, 2 to 10 times that of regular fuel—2 to 10 times. Aviation is expensive enough on its own, but paying 2 to 10 times more for fuel just because we can make it, when we have abundant fuel otherwise, is—it is—like, quite literally, it's crazy.

But beyond that, the people that want these fuels don't think that that is enough, right? That is not even enough for them, par-

ticularly for GA pilots. They want you all to fly less. And that is the only thing that is going to appease them. Let's face it, the only thing that is really going to appease them is when you don't fly at all.

So, with that in mind, as the leader of AOPA, and thinking particularly about the increased price of fuel, which increases the cost of flying, what is AOPA's plan to address what I would characterize as an insane activism to jack up the price for fuel and to have us end this misguided, quixotic mission to use something other than what has worked for decades upon decades now safely and is abundant and is affordable? What's your plan?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Yes. Thank you, Congressman, for the question.

And you are right; this is—at AOPA's core is protecting our collective freedom to fly. Fees and expenses are just an underlying constraint on that mission.

And you mentioning SAF and the, I will say, broader set of fees, the ones I talked about in my opening statement, whether it is the FBO fees, landing fees, insurance, all these costs begin to add on top. So we wake up every day looking at how those fees are changing over time and what role can we play in helping to drive those down.

To your specific question, then, I think we take several tacks on that. One is, where is the future going? So you talked about SAF. Another example would be unleaded fuel, going from leaded to unleaded fuel——

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. That is my next one, the EAGLE initiative, another crazy initiative where literally some airports have banned regular fuel, and it has resulted in accidents and incidents——

Mr. PLEASANCE [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. All for no reason. There is absolutely zero reason to do any of this, and it increases the cost.

So, as the advocates for all GA pilots, like, where do you stand on it? You can tell where I stand. Where do you stand?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Yes. Well, so we will resist everything that increases the cost to fly, right?

Now, that doesn't mean it is going to be zero, because it does cost money to run the infrastructure and to produce the fuels that we use.

In the case of unleaded fuels, that is one that we are probably more supportive than not, because there is only one producer of tetraethyl lead in the world, over in the U.K., and we are concerned about the future of the availability of that one——

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. Maybe we should subsidize that.

Mr. PLEASANCE. I don't know if we subsidize that.

Mr. PERRY. No, we should. But that is another story.

Mr. PLEASANCE. But you have one producer in the world who makes that. So we, as a country, are beholden on one single manufacturer, so, that concerns us. And for those of us who have used unleaded fuel, it actually works well in the airplanes, in the engine.

So, there are constraints between today and being able to widely roll a fuel like that out that we are concerned about, some safety-

related concerns, but we will advocate for that transition to be done in a safe and thoughtful way.

More broadly to your question, though, around fees, a big part of it is pushing back, just like you are. I fully agree with—if you look at the full spectrum of fees out there, many of them raise serious questions as to, sort of, the viability of why such a change would be imposed on what is, as has been said earlier, the most vibrant aviation ecosystem in the world.

And for someone like me who has traveled the world and seen aviation across Europe, across Asia, it is remarkable when you come back to this country and see how vibrant it is and how widespread the use of general aviation is to support even the general public, whether it is medevac or firefighting and all of these practices that happen that, unfortunately, most of the general public doesn't realize.

So, I will end with saying, I think one of the biggest things we can do with AOPA is to educate the public on how important this infrastructure is that we have and how important this world of general aviation is to the economy and to their very lives, whether it is teaching the future airline pilots of the world to fly, whether it is handling a medevac flight, whether it is disaster recovery and delivering supplies to a post-hurricane environment. All of those things are general aviation.

And my hope—and we fight this battle every day—is that, as more people hear and appreciate the value that general aviation provides, some of the crazy stuff that is happening out there gets less momentum, because people do want to support what we all know and love so much.

Mr. PERRY. I yield.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Mr. Garcia.

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to all of our witnesses here today.

I just want to obviously emphasize that all these issues that are being discussed today are at the top of mind for a lot of folks. Certainly, when I am back home, people talk to me about the price of healthcare, they talk to me about the cost of goods, and they talk to me about safety at our airports, at our airlines, and what is happening at the FAA. It is at the top of mind of constituents across my community and, I think, across the country.

And so these hearings and these questions are really important, so I want to thank all of you.

I know that, obviously, staffing challenges is a huge issue for the FAA, especially for air traffic controllers.

As an example, I represent the Long Beach Airport back in my home community of Long Beach. This is an airport that is a municipal airport run by the city. I served as mayor there for 8 years, and so I know the airport really well. I have had a chance to meet and I know much of the staff at the airport: the TSA folks, the air traffic controllers, the workers there.

You may not know that the FAA has determined for our airport that we need 26 certified controllers. We currently have 19.

Now, these are positions, of course, that, with mistakes, with health concerns, if there are issues where folks need to take some time off, we are creating a very serious issue at our airport and for safety.

And I want to be clear, the Long Beach Airport is safe. These air traffic controllers are incredibly talented. In my opinion, they are heroes. And they work really hard to ensure the safety of all people.

But I think I speak for a lot of folks when I say the biggest priority as we implement the FAA reauthorization is to follow through on our promises to build and support our workforce, ensuring people know what their roles are and a safe experience for all passengers.

Now, I think it is really important, of course, that, as we have these conversations, we are looking at safety on all fronts. It is the safety for air traffic controllers as well as our commercial pilots. The FAA, of course—the process of clearing someone to return for work for all of these positions after a medical or mental health issue is also really important, and we know that you are all involved in this work. And we all agree that we need to be completely certain it is safe before putting someone back in a tower or a cockpit.

I know that there was an internal presentation at the FAA last month suggesting staff departures could affect the processing of medical clearances for pilots and air traffic controllers.

Captain Reven, can you share what the process of regaining your clearance to fly actually entails?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you, Congressman, for the question.

So, as I understand, you are talking about for a lost medical. So there are a couple of different avenues there. The special issuance is the one where we see the most problems in the past, and that has improved. We have been working with Dr. Northrup, who is the FAA flight surgeon, on reducing those timelines.

But, as an example, someone has a failed EKG. And, in the past, there were times where the cardiac board was only meeting twice a month or quarterly or even longer sometimes. And so this person had already been cleared by his AME. Okay, you are cleared to go fly; everything is back within the right ranges. But he was waiting for that board to meet. So that was 10 years ago; this problem has been on our horizon.

Now they have gotten those down to an average of 90 days, which we are absolutely thrilled with. There will be departures here and there, but he works with his AME, who is not an employee of the FAA——

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA [interrupting]. Now, can——

Mr. REVEN [continuing]. And that paperwork filters up.

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA. Again, Captain, I have heard those same stats. I think that is really impressive, and I think as the FAA presentation, the internal presentation that was presented, I will talk about staff departures and how they could negatively actually impact this process. We have made so much progress, and yet these staff departures could really be a hindrance to the progress that we have made.

Part of last year's FAA reauthorization created a working group to recommend ways of improving, of course, some of these procedures. The aviation rulemaking committee also put out their own recommendations on mental health and aviation medical clearances last year.

Captain, do you know if any of those recommendations—additional recommendations have been adopted by the FAA—and I know some of them have, obviously—on the timeline?

Mr. REVEN. Yes. We are pleased with the progress, but you can never do too much. Specifically, you mentioned mental health. We have a peer support program at SWAPA, but near and dear to my heart, maybe earlier this year, a classmate of mine, a 20-year employee of Southwest Airlines, took his own life.

So we have got a lot of room to work. We have got a lot of—it is a weakness for pilots who feel like I have to "John Wayne" this. I have got to keep it secret. If I tell somebody, "I need to talk to somebody, I am going through this problem."

We have also got to get towards a company with a just culture that encourages self-reporting, as opposed to having some sort of a punishment-type culture. And I do think we are making great strides at Southwest Airlines and in the industry, that side.

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you. I am out of time. I just want to thank you, and just to conclude, just say that mental health of all folks and their physical health, whether they are pilots, whether they are traffic controllers, whether they are flight attendants, is so important, and I just hope that we recognize that these reductions are making—ensuring that we have a healthy team at all of our airports as possible.

So, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. REVEN. Thank you.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize our fearless leader of the full committee, Chairman Graves.

Mr. GRAVES. Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I actually don't have any questions.

I think I am pretty familiar with the reauthorization, but I do want to welcome all my friends here to the committee, and we appreciate your testimony, and we appreciate your insight, as much as anything else. Thanks.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, sir.

Ms. NELSON. We appreciate you too, Chairman Graves.

Mr. NEHLS. Isn't he wonderful? Ms. Nelson, isn't he wonderful? We have strong leadership on this committee.

I now recognize Mr. Stauber.

Mr. STAUBER. Thank you very much.

Currently, pilots and air traffic controllers who seek mental health care are unfairly penalized. While aviation professionals are mandated to report if they seek mental health care, once they take that step, they are faced with delays, confusion, and broad regulations to return to work. This often means that relatively minor health concerns result in long wait times and derailed careers for safe and well-trained pilots and air traffic controllers.

As a former police officer, there were two times in my career that I needed help with calls for service. I was escorted out of the squad room by a commander, Commander Lieutenant Bob Brasel, after an individual tried to kill me.

Lieutenant Brasel said, Pete, how are you doing? And in front of my colleagues, I said, I'm tough, a hockey player. I have won fights, I have lost fights. I'm okay.

I was crushed inside.

I left my night shift after the incident. Sitting on the halls, the city step halls of Duluth, Minnesota, watching the sunrise over Lake Superior, the most beautiful sunrise I have ever seen. The grass was as green as ever, knowing I am alive that morning. I needed that help at that moment because when I went home, I never told my wife, as she was leaving for work, what had happened.

I go to rollcall. Bob Brasel met me there. He knew I needed help. I needed that police counselor that night, and I got the help I needed. And I returned for 22 straight years after that, and it was because I had a leader that understood that it is not—the stigmatism of mental health must go in this Nation because one in four of us, one in four of us adults are going to experience that in our lifetime. No matter what we do or say, we are going to experience that.

And our professional airline pilots are no different. And when I hear that our airline pilots, when they ask for help, that they are removed, the stigma is there. They are delayed in getting help, and some of them can't even get their jobs back or are delayed until they get their jobs back, which affects their family.

That is wrong and that stops right here and right now with the Mental Health in Aviation Act that I am proudly sponsoring with Representative Casten from Illinois.

Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for what you do. Thanks for bringing clarity to the situation. It should never happen. And once that bill happens, if any of you need help, you will get it, the door will be open. And then you will return to your jobs, carrying the most precious cargo: people. And you all know that.

My goal is to have, if it happens, to have the same affect that that counseling happened to me as a police officer, to be able to work through it, manage through it, because we have help for you. And never will you lose your job and never will that stigma stay with you, because we are all humans and it happens to us, and it happened to me almost 31 years ago. Even back then I had a leader in the police department.

And you are all leaders in the profession of aviation, and I am proud of each and every one of you. I fly a couple times every week. We all do. You carry us, and our families and our friends depend on you.

Make no mistake, this committee, Chairman Graves, Chairman Nehls, and my Democrats on the other side of the aisle all agree with this bill. This is not a messaging bill. This bill is going to get across the finish line in a bipartisan fashion. The President is going to sign it, and never again will you have to wonder if you should ask for help.

I had questions prepared, Mr. Reven, for you, and I am sorry I didn't get to them, but I wanted to tell you all my personal opinion,

my personal experience of asking for help. Asking for help is actual strength, and we have to honor that and make a commitment. Never again will you have to be forced to get into that cockpit if you are dealing with some issues around you or your family, because, remember, one in four of us in our lifetime as adults will need help. God bless you and thanks for carrying us safely.

And I yield back.

Mr. REVEN. Thank you, Congressman.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you, Pete. Well said.

I now recognize Mr. Johnson for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, for convening this hearing, and thank you to our witnesses today for your testimony.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 was a historic bipartisan commitment to public safety, modern infrastructure, a stronger workforce, and consumer protection, but the law is only as strong as its execution, and right now, that execution is being sabotaged.

A year ago, we came together across party lines to move aviation forward, but instead of building on that progress, the Trump administration is gutting it. Slashing the FAA and DOT workforces while tasking them with over 500 mandates is calculated sabotage. You don't modernize aviation by laying off the professionals who keep planes in the sky and passengers alive. You don't protect safety by sidelining the very people who ensure it, unless the goal is to watch the system fail and pretend it's not by design.

Now, Congress did its job, and the administration now needs to do theirs. Stop the sabotage and implement this law fully, swiftly, and in good faith.

Democrats are watching. We are not backing down, and we will not let politics put lives at risk. And I am personally happy that Elon Musk has left the scene.

Mr. Bolen, the National Business Aviation Association represents a wide range of small businesses and operators across the country, many of them based at regional airports that rely on Federal contracts and grants. Now, the Trump administration is trying to dismantle the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program, a longstanding initiative that helps minority- and women-owned small businesses fairly compete for those contracts.

Are you concerned about the impact of eliminating the DBE program and what impact that elimination would have on small operators in your association and the business opportunities in the aviation industry overall?

Mr. BOLEN. Mr. Johnson, you are correct, business aviation does involve a lot of small companies, midsized companies. I think 85 percent of our members are small and midsized companies. A lot of——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. And some of them are disadvantaged businesses as well, correct?

Mr. BOLEN. That is correct.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. And so shouldn't we be continuing the DBE program?

Mr. BOLEN. There are a number of programs, and I think——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Shouldn't we be continuing those?

Mr. BOLEN. I think what we want to do is make sure that there is access——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. And that is what the program—that is what the DBE program tries to make available is to be able to get access. What's wrong with that?

Mr. BOLEN. Probably——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Is it simply because it falls under the DEI category and you don't want to talk about that right now to jeopardize whatever you are trying to protect? I understand. But let me move on.

Ms. Nelson, at our last full committee hearing on the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act, one thing was clear: Our air traffic controllers are working under intense pressure, long hours, high stakes, and this atmosphere of fear created by constant political games is wearing them down. That is a heavy burden for anyone, but I imagine it is just as hard, if not harder, for flight attendants who are working exhausting hours at 30,000 feet, and they are responsible for the safety and well-being of every person on board.

Can you speak to how the chaos and instability in these few months of the Trump administration has impacted flight attendants and others on the front lines of aviation safety?

Ms. NELSON. First of all, we count on our air traffic controllers, and we are very concerned about the stresses that they have been under, and our safety inspectors. This directly affects us on the job.

If we don't have a system that is supporting us—there are questions from flight attendants saying, why are air traffic controllers being asked to justify their jobs? Why are they getting notices like everyone else, even though it wasn't intended for them to leave? And why are their pensions being attacked? Because this kind of instability is not supportive of keeping people focused on safety.

We know—and I appreciate very much your question about flight attendants. We are in the middle of bargaining and trying to address some of these issues with the airlines. It is very difficult to do our jobs when you have all of this instability going on and when we also see that demand is softening because people don't want to come to the U.S. Ticket prices are dropping, and as we are bargaining, that is a real concern, too.

So everyone is concerned with that instability, and we know very well that in order to have a business work, you have to have stability in order to invest, in order to staff up, in order to be able to do the work. So the attacks on pensions for Federal workers and collective bargaining agreements we also feel on the job, too, and we feel that transition also into our discussions with the airlines.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you.

My time has expired, and I yield back.

Mr. WIED [presiding]. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Hurd for 5 minutes.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Thank you very much.

I want to thank Chairman Nehls and Ranking Member Cohen for holding this hearing.

I represent a very large district in western and southern Colorado, Colorado's Third Congressional District. It is basically half the geographic footprint of the State. One of the facts that blew my

mind when I was originally running for office, and I think surprised a lot of folks back East, is that it is larger geographically than the entire State of Pennsylvania. So it is a big district. And general aviation airports are crucial for accessibility, for emergency services, for ag operations, for economic development.

I wanted to ask, Mr. Bolen, now that the FAA is 1 year into implementing reauthorization, how effectively has it implemented provisions intended to support and modernize rural aviation infrastructure?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think that was one of the really great accomplishments of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. As you well know, we saw the funding levels for airports go from $3.35 billion to $4 billion, with a lot of that specifically directed toward rural airports. And that is critically important, because as you articulated, these airports are lifelines for rural communities. They provide medical support, they provide emergency relief, they are there in times of disaster.

We need to make sure that those airports have an opportunity to survive, they have an opportunity to do matching grants, and I think that is exactly what this committee had in mind, and I think that it is an enormous step for the United States to keep its leadership in every aspect of general aviation.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Thank you very much.

Yes, it is critical, these services and airports in rural parts of the country for sure, and it is important that we make sure we continue this implementation to help those rural parts of our country.

Mr. Pleasance, is the FAA doing enough to ensure general aviation airports have sufficient infrastructure funding during their implementation of the reauthorization?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Is the FAA doing enough, is that the question?

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Yes, sir.

Mr. PLEASANCE. That is a great question. I don't see evidence that they are not doing enough. However, some of the examples I gave earlier around some of these smaller airports that are suffering from some of the fees, you do have examples out there where you have got singular FBOs operating in locations and, to some extent, take over the economics of that airport. And I think our concern from an FAA perspective is not as much enforcement of the grant assurance language around fair and reasonable fees that ultimately do affect the ability and attractiveness of the flying public to use those airports.

And it is not every airport, right. This is, by and large, a lot of the small airports—call it "in the middle of nowhere" around the country—are doing just fine, but there are a number of airports that are important access points to parts of the country, including out in your part of Colorado, where we do have concerns that we are seeing increasing evidence of fees going up, access to those airports going down, and the FAA not doing as much as we believe they should do to ensure that the access to those airports remains viable.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. That is very helpful. Thank you.

Mr. Bolen, back to you. Workforce development and retention are critical issues for rural districts like mine in Colorado's Third District. Pilot workforce shortages have particularly impacted rural re-

gions who have seen reduced service to their communities as a result, and having a strong general aviation pipeline is key to ensuring that we have a strong supply of commercial pilots.

What are some ideas or initiatives that your members have considered to address these critical aviation workforce shortages to retain talent in our rural communities? And has the 2024 reauthorization been helpful in facilitating aviation workforce development in rural areas?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think the bill itself did a number of really important things. It created some important grant programs and provided $20 million for aviation maintenance technicians and a pathway to pilots. So those are important programs.

I think the challenge that we all have is how do we raise awareness of what these opportunities are. There are a lot of people that have not focused on the opportunities available through aviation or see themselves in what they see as something different and apart for a different segment of the community.

I think the efforts to go into high schools, the efforts that are being made by organizations like AOPA with their curriculum are really important. I think we also need to focus on our ability to work with the technical schools and the community colleges, another opportunity to make people aware of what is out there.

So NBAA is working through its members. Fortunately, we have got people in every congressional district, and that gives us an opportunity to be part of the local community. We encourage career days at airports. We encourage going into schools. We can't do enough to express the opportunities that are available, the life-changing opportunities in aviation and specifically general aviation.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Wonderful. Agreed. Thank you so such.

I see my time has expired. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WIED. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Ms. Brownley for 5 minutes.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Pleasance, I have a question about so-called aircraft kits. About a month ago, there was a fatal crash in Simi Valley, California, in my congressional district, which involved a home-built kit airplane that crashed into homes and killed two people.

According to the FAA, the FAA does not certify or approve aircraft kits. Can you comment on the current safety regulations around aircraft kits and the certification process and airworthiness reviews or maybe lack thereof for these amateur-built kit aircraft?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Yes, absolutely. So part of what has made the U.S. as much of a leader in aviation as it is, is in large part because of our willingness to innovate, and the whole—they call it experimental aircraft or home-built aircraft—movement has become a giant part of this ecosystem.

The aircraft you are talking about in Simi Valley was a Van's RV–10. I am very familiar with the accident. Van's has produced more kit aircraft than any other company, over 11,000 of them. The vast majority, 99-point-whatever percent, fly safely every day.

So I am a very strong supporter of that ecosystem. I think, to me, it is a great example of how we as a country continue to innovate, because many of the innovations that make their way into certified aircraft come out of the home-built or experimental area.

To your point around not being certified, they—you are right, they are not certified. However, that does not mean they don't have oversight from the FAA. They actually do. So as these kits are built, and they are very well-designed kits with very well-structured plans and instructions on how to do it, each major stage of build has to be overseen by an FAA-licensed mechanic to basically authorize it to move on to the next stage.

So although they don't end up at the end being certified like a certified aircraft would be, they do end up with a level of inspection that ensures it was built in compliance with the manufacturer of the kit's recommendation. So I personally am a big fan of it. I think it drives a lot of vitality.

Accidents like that one where that was a weather-related accident, not an aircraft-related accident, it could have been in any other kind of plane. So I guess I would not want the general public to think that just since the word either "experimental" or "homebuilt" is used, it implies that there is a level of safety that is somehow given up. These aircrafts are also a very, very safe aircraft.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Well, I don't think NTSB has finished their investigation around that crash in my district.

Mr. PLEASANCE. You're right.

Ms. BROWNLEY. And I also know that FAA doesn't approve the kit manufacturers.

I guess what you are saying is the way the system is right now is what you would prefer, that there shouldn't be any further regulations around aircraft kits, homemade.

Mr. PLEASANCE. That's correct. And if we discover there is a problem, a specific problem, of course, I would be very supportive of addressing that. But right now, I think the FAA oversight and then in partnership with AOPA, also the Experimental Aircraft Association in Wisconsin, play a big role. We all have a vested interest in those aircraft being as safe as possible.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you.

Ms. Nelson, this hearing is about implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act. So from your perspective, in terms of the administration and DOGE cuts and the FAA workforce cuts, can you comment on if and how it has slowed down rulemaking and key priorities to keep moving forward on implementation?

Ms. NELSON. First of all, I just want to note that as safety professionals, we learn the first rule in safety is to remove all distractions. So while we have—we very, very much appreciate the leadership of Secretary Duffy pushing forward on trying to modernize and staff up and work with the unions on all of that.

But at the same time, to have the administration creating all of these other distractions, it is undermining the process. And in specific areas of the bill that, of course, we are concerned about, doing away with committees, doing away with rulemaking committees, that is jeopardizing the plans of this committee and the direction from this committee and all of Congress on what needs to be done in all areas of safety in order to lift us up.

We are very, very focused, obviously, on the modernization and staffing of air traffic control, but there are other portions of safety. You can't take any of those for granted, and there are a lot of prior-

ities in the bill that are being sidelined because of what DOGE has done.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you for that.

And one quick last question. Captain Reven, I wanted to just check in with you on the overseas maintenance stations and if you believe there is anything more that needs to be done to ensure our safety standards there.

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman.

I can only speak to Southwest Airlines and our methodology. We have a very rich and robust safety and inspection where we operate and take those planes down in South America. We have our check airman corps who are our most highly professional overseeing the rest of our pilot group that have a specific nonroutine flight operations certification. They go down there and do that, and they put those planes through their paces after they take them out of maintenance, turn off switches, turn on systems, turn them back on. It is operating as it should.

Ms. BROWNLEY. I think my time is done, so I need to yield back. Thank you.

Mr. REVEN. Okay. I hope I answered your question.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you.

Mr. WIED. The gentlewoman yields back.

I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I am very proud to represent the great State of Wisconsin, and it is home to many great general aviation airports.

The municipal airport in Watertown, Wisconsin, for example, has experienced issues with the FAA's eligibility requirements for a runway expansion project. Specifically, the airport is struggling to secure airport improvement program, AIP, funding even after conducting necessary environmental studies, rerouting a city road, and purchasing additional land for a buffer requirement.

As the Watertown Airport has worked towards achieving AIP eligibility requirements, it is estimated the runway expansion project cost has ballooned from $2.5 million in 2005 to nearly $15 million today. The small airport fund of the AIP establishes a calculation to ensure that a required level of discretionary funding is used on small airports.

So, Mr. Pleasance and Mr. Bolen, if you both could weigh in, what actions could be taken to help make AIP eligibility easier to obtain for smaller airports?

Mr. PLEASANCE. So that is definitely not my area of expertise. I have got, I will call it sympathy, for what feels like increasing levels of bureaucracy and overhead that the airports are having to jump through. I think this body putting some additional guidelines in the sense of requirements on the FAA to impose a level of what I call reasonableness in what is required to justify an airport.

I see a couple of examples in other parts of the country where extra dollars are being spent, in my view, to actually make the airport less safe. Reducing the length of a runway, for example, or eliminating a cross runway that take dollars to accomplish.

So I suppose it would be around this body's ability to provide greater clarity on the ability to simplify the path to improving airports.

Mr. BOLEN. Yes, I will follow up. I agree with what Mr. Pleasance said. I think one of the things that we have recognized in the United States is that it is difficult to build airports, build runways, and we want to make sure that we are able to create as many airports as we can. These are nodes in a system. The more nodes we have, the more valuable the system becomes.

And as aircrafts get bigger, we need longer runways, and we need to have the safety buffers built in. So I think what we really need to do is very much focus on what the impediments are and to address them. Like you are talking about going from $2.5 million to $15 million, that has not served anyone, and it has not increased the health of Watertown, and it hasn't increased the safety in the system.

Mr. WIED. All right. Thank you.

Mr. Bolen, one for you. How is business aviation being integrated into FAA modernization efforts?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think we are part of the Modern Skies Coalition, and I think we recognize that the public airspace belongs to the public, and making sure that we have access to airspace and airports is critical. I think that is one of the things that has made the United States unique, and I think that that is our real strength.

When we talk about things that will increase safety and increase efficiency, coordination, communication, connectivity, that helps everyone. The more precise we can be in our flights, the more clear we can be exactly where we are with clear situational awareness, that makes everybody safer, and that is why business aviation, general aviation, labor, commercial airlines, we are all in this together.

Mr. WIED. Is the FAA listening to and incorporating noncommercial general aviation airports?

Mr. BOLEN. I think the airport office recognizes the importance of airports. I think as Mr. Pleasance has brought up, there are times when we would like to see more aggressive use of the part 16 efforts. We know that in some communities, developers or others like the idea of the land, but we want to make sure that we have a viable national system of airports, and that is why we have the whole NPIAS program.

Mr. WIED. All right. Thank you.

Thank you all for being here today.

I yield back.

I recognize Mr. DeSaulnier for 5 minutes.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you all for being here. It is a combination of anxiety, but we want to be thoughtful to this. I have said this before. Mr. Chairman, I do hope that we are communicating with the administration. And Secretary Duffy is a former colleague. I have heard him say, make some comments after the terrible tragedy at DCA that indicated to me that he wasn't fully aware of the work we have done and are doing in terms of going after more money, which, of course, we would welcome from the administration. But just that coordination and the wonderful leadership we had from Chairman Graves to get this to this point, and I am really appreciative that we are continuing to stay on it.

Captain, I want to ask you a couple of things. First, in the short term, what are you and your pilots seeing on the ground about near-misses, new technology that we are trying to get in?

I know I bring this up all the time because it was my introduction to commercial aviation, the near-miss 10 years ago, the Air Canada flight at SFO in my area where we came within 54 feet. If it wasn't for the copilot of the United plane, the first plane on the taxiway, and all the work we put into NOTAMs.

What are you seeing from that perspective? Now, that is 10 years ago almost. Have those things improved? Are pilots reading the NOTAMs? Are they more digestible? And in the nearer term, has that created greater safety from the pilots' perspective?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

On the NOTAMs part, it is getting better. They are starting to be a little—they are a little more decoded than they used to be, starting to be a little more condensed. The packets that we tailor are very condensed for the areas that we are going, and pilots are very responsible about reading those. Our dispatchers are also fantastic for reviewing those and the 121 operation, making sure that you are safe and prepared for the location you are going to.

To your question on the ground, it is getting better and better with the technology that is out there. We have the RAAS, which is a Runway Awareness and Advisory System. I have to look at that acronym all the time.

Mr. DESAULNIER. I will take some credit for getting that.

Mr. REVEN. It lets you know, hey, you are getting close to a runway, you are getting close to a taxiway. It is in about 83 percent of our aircraft at Southwest Airlines and ahead of schedule for being 100 percent instituted. It is just another great tool.

The concern and what I see out there, the concern that I have is with air traffic control manning. One of the pilots that was on the Midway flight, he brought up a great example with Secretary Duffy. He said, hey, here in Denver, routinely on the weekends, they will go to one controller that operates both ground and tower frequencies. That's a problem. That's a problem, and it's a manning problem. It's not being irresponsible; it's just having the coverage to do so.

So as you know, every commercial flight is an orchestrated event between air traffic control, the pilots, the ground operations, the flight attendants to get the passengers safely from A to B. So those are some of our concerns, just the manning and the coverage.

Mr. DESAULNIER. And I have mentioned this, just in the tower with the air traffic controllers, again at SFO, and the thing that was alarming was retention, the burnout, particularly in those areas that have lots of flights in the urban areas where the differential isn't enough. So you think about attracting people into the field, whether it is pilots or air traffic controllers or mechanics.

On the pilot side, I have heard from some of my pilots talking about the training and that difficulty of the great training that so many pilots got in the military and now trying to get that in the private sector. And one just anecdotal story is younger pilots will start at a training school in Arizona, go work for a regional airline, and have never really been in bad weather before. Could you—and the anxiety that creates.

You have any comments on that kind of scenario and how we can improve that?

Mr. REVEN. Absolutely. I think a good part of that is experience, and there are lots of moves to try to reduce—there have been in the past, and I applaud this body for maintaining the strict 1,500-hour rule for an ATP, but there is no substitute for experience. And oftentimes folks will build those hours, and they have never been in the weather. So keeping that level of experience ensures that people have seen multiple, different, challenging environments and platforms.

And so we do have fantastic young people that come to our airline, and they have seen real weather scenarios, and they continue to see those with an experienced guy in the left seat. So I think it is working as it should currently, and I applaud this body on their decisions.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Ms. Nelson, just briefly, your folks are right at the retail point. We have had a lot of problems with stress and anxiety, COVID and post-COVID. How is that working out, just briefly? How are you dealing with customers who are stressed?

Ms. NELSON. Well, it is a real challenge, and so, more education and more communication. We did have very, very clear communication from the FAA Administrator repeatedly and from the President in the last administration to make it very clear that people who acted out were going to jail. That continued conversation and leadership from all of our leaders is very, very helpful, and we would actually ask for people to continue to be talking about that, continue to be talking about the consequences and making it very clear what we expect of people when they come to the airport.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. WIED. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. Shreve for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHREVE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the lady and the gentlemen for sharing time with us today.

I represent central and eastern Indiana. I have got the Indianapolis Airport in my district. We describe Indy as being at the crossroads of America. We have got a nexus of Federal highways that traverse there, but as a consequence of that, FedEx has their second largest air cargo hub at IND, and that is growing by volume.

Captain Reven, you move more passenger traffic through IND than any other passenger carrier. We were successful in securing a $27 million AIP grant and are rebuilding 5R out there. We are nearing completion on that, and we will get another 40 years out of that runway, and that is just crucial to commerce, both cargo and passengers.

But I wondered if you could speak from a pilot's perspective as to the importance of that hard infrastructure, that physical environment that they are bringing aircraft in and out of on, please.

Mr. REVEN. I thank you for the question, Congressman, and absolutely support that project.

UPS flies in and out of there—or FedEx, excuse me, flies in and out of there at high volume. Mostly they do it at night, and that gives them some efficiencies when they are more heavyweight, when they need a little bit longer runway. It makes the flexibility for us much better too with any kind of inclement weather.

So fully in support. Always excited to see another project like that in an option, in a safety environment.

Mr. SHREVE. Yes. As with both Worldport just down the road in Louisville, with UPS and FedEx in Indianapolis, the busiest times of the day are in the middle of the night when all that traffic is sequencing in through there, and so that infrastructure really matters.

Captain, I also toured Indy Center, and I have been up in the tower before. But we describe ourselves as the crossroads of America, but we have got a lot of traffic that Indy Center is managing. It moves from Atlanta into the Chicago area at different altitudes. And we are short on human talent at Indy Center, just as we are across the country.

We have heard so much about the challenges in Newark that have acutely impacted United. I wondered if from Southwest's perspective there were pain points in the system that you would draw our attention to other than Newark.

Mr. REVEN. Sure. There are a lot of pain points in the system, and it did not come about in the last 6 months. We have been seeing this decline—or this problem with air traffic control manning, line of sight restrictions, et cetera, have a lot of problems down in Florida.

One example where the Homestead Air Force Base radar shuts down in the southern tip of Florida, and the whole TRACON at Florida shuts down. So they have instituted some great things with the slowing down aircraft to doing the ground stop program to make sure they get those under control, and we have seen definite improvements.

The manning continues to be a concern for us, for air traffic controllers. And I was talking a bit with NATCA yesterday, and they did a great job in this testifying body, this last testimony, with the challenges that they have. And we are just as supportive of them as we can be. They are absolute consummate professionals, the controllers.

So we also applaud you for the grants and getting into high schools and getting in early and starting to highlight that profession and the need for it.

Mr. SHREVE. We sorely need the talent. It would seem like it would be a profession that could be attractive to young people that grow up gaming. If the hardware that they are working with was brought into the current century, I think that we would have the ability to pull young people into these cool, dark, windowless, bunkered sort of facilities as they move safely people and commerce around our country.

But we are struggling with that at the moment, and part of that is a function of the very dated hardware, the DOS sort of world that they come into and can't identify with. I am determined to make some progress with this.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. WIED. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Mrs. Foushee for 5 minutes.

Mrs. FOUSHEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for being with us today.

Fume contamination occurs frequently on commercial flights. Nearly all commercial aircraft draw outside air through the engines into the cabin, which is then recirculated throughout the cabin. As we all know, the recent FAA reauthorization bill included numerous provisions to help address this issue, including a requirement to complete a study on the impacts of bleed air, the development of a reporting system for fume events that occur on board a commercial aircraft within 180 days, and the issuance of formal recommendations to mitigate the impact of fume contamination on cabin air quality by 2027.

Ms. Nelson, while we look forward to the report findings and recommendations offered, what can be done now to improve flight attendant health and safety in the short term?

Ms. NELSON. Thank you very much. And I would also include our flight deck partners in this. We actually issue a card to all of our members about air quality and what to do, how to recognize it and report it when you find it. This would be a very simple thing for all airlines to do and to provide it to not only all the crewmembers but also maintenance.

We have issues today where we will have a flight return to the gate because there is a report of dirty socks, the smell that you get when you have that contaminated bleed air, a report of people feeling headaches, feeling nauseous, and it will return. And sometimes when the maintenance crew and the crews do not know what is going on with that, they will tow the plane away from the gate, deplane the passengers, keep the crew on board, and fire up the engine so that the crew, the flight attendants are subjected to those fumes again.

So if we are providing information to all of the pilots and flight attendants and maintenance, we will avoid very serious and unnecessary events like that.

Mrs. FOUSHEE. We will hear from others if you care to speak.

Mr. REVEN. Obviously, we echo the same concerns. And I appreciate the pilots have even one more concern that not everyone else deals with and that is the amount of radiation that is in the cockpits.

So one of the things we have engaged the company, and a lot of other carriers have, too, is what comes in the factory, the safety information or the safety equipment, and their appeal that carriers don't strip that safety equipment off, like sunshades and things that can protect you from the UV.

And then we look forward to also the outcome of that study on the bleed air. So thank you for the question.

Mrs. FOUSHEE. Additionally, Ms. Nelson, your testimony highlights the danger of radiation exposure to fertility and viability of pregnancy. While you mention no action has been taken at this time, what would you suggest be done to increase radiation exposure education and safety for flight attendants?

Ms. NELSON. There is a form on the FAA site that could help you track your radiation exposure, but that link is dead now. If we could direct the FAA to make that available again and then encourage the airlines. There can be encouragement from Congress, there can be encouragement from the FAA to provide information to

flight attendants and pilots to be able to track that and make good decisions for themselves.

This is something that is done in Europe, and flight attendants and pilots can avoid flights when they are pregnant or they are trying to get pregnant to be able to avoid that radiation exposure because this has been quite an issue, not just with fertility, other illnesses as well. But understanding your potential risks helps you make choices to be able to avoid those risks.

Mrs. FOUSHEE. Thank you for that.

And finally, we tend to forget that ramp workers play a role in commercial air travel because travelers do not interact with them directly, but the reality is that countless travelers rely on baggage handlers. When you consider the duties that they perform, we can see that this work can quickly become dangerous.

In your testimony, Ms. Nelson, you share that significant training challenges and hazard concerns persist for ramp workers. Can you share more about these challenges and concerns, highlighting which ones you believe are the most important or the most urgent for the FAA to address?

Ms. NELSON. Sure. A lot of this is about staffing up, of course, with the assessment of what is happening across the airport, but what can happen right away is that all of the airlines can be directed not to have ramp tasking schedules that are unrealistic with task times.

These are things that are within the airlines' control today. Avoid overlapping assignments and rush transition for these workers, and, of course, education for everyone.

We have had people die over the last several years, and it is unacceptable and inexcusable, and it is part of the drive towards productivity in very low paying jobs, I will say, oftentimes without benefits. And then also asking them to do more with less. So this is something that the airlines can actually step up on right away and make these situations better while the FAA is addressing the rest of the priorities here.

Mrs. FOUSHEE. Thank you for sharing that.

I yield back.

Mr. WIED. The gentlewoman yields back.

I now recognize Mr. McDowell for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCDOWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to the witnesses for being here to testify before the subcommittee today.

Mr. Bolen, I want to discuss pilot mental health and the recommendations in last year's reauthorization bill. As you know, aviation professionals, such as pilots and air traffic controllers, are required to report if they seek mental health care, but admitting to receiving mental health care can result in a bureaucratic paperwork shuffle at the FAA that prevents pilots from going back to work.

This is unintentionally punitive, in my opinion, and it eliminates the incentives for aviation professionals to seek mental health treatment that they need. With that in mind, how would you recommend that the FAA address this issue while prioritizing the safety of our airspace first and foremost?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think a couple of things are happening in this area, and I think, as we heard earlier, one in four adults is impacted by this issue. It is significant in scope and the risks are significant. So we have got to do things where we understand better what the options are.

There was an aviation rulemaking committee, an ARC, put together on mental health that completed its work and has made recommendations. And then, of course, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 focuses on the aeromedical office, but specifically focuses on mental health as well. So I think understanding more about what we are talking about and understanding those treatments.

We heard Captain Reven talking about the peer-to-peer focus at his airport. I think the important thing is we find ways for people to come forward, to destigmatize, and then to take the appropriate steps based on what the situation is today, not what has happened years ago, or finding new ways to move forward.

And there has been progress. We have seen medications that are now available that were not before. So I think we are making progress, but I think this has to remain a front burner issue for everyone in the United States, but particularly the aviation community.

Mr. MCDOWELL. Sure. Thank you.

Captain Reven, same question to you. How would you fix current policy to ensure that pilots aren't punished for seeking help?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Congressman. And I agree with much of what Mr. Bolen said. In addition to that, we have had some very productive meetings with the FAA flight surgeon, Dr. Northrup, and she has been very open to our inputs.

The 8500, the Form 8500 that you accomplish when you are getting ready for your flight physical, that is in need of update. There are questions on there that just shouldn't be asked. I think that one should be asked differently, that you referred to.

The amount of lookback that you have to go to to go, okay, I have to keep track of each doctor's visit that I did for how many years. I told you that last year. So I am just trying to do this form correctly. Some of it is just redundant and it is overly burdensome on the member.

That is probably the most important one to me that you mentioned about the pilot mental health question. I think we need to look at how we word that and what we do with that information.

We have a group that meets regularly, and I would be happy to provide some bullets. We did this for Secretary Duffy when he first kind of came out of the gate after the Midway incident. He said, hey, what should we be looking at? And through our Government affairs and our subject matter experts, we provided a huge list of bullets.

I would be really—I would be hopeful that I could do that for you in this area too, as far as the Form 8500 and the mental health.

Mr. MCDOWELL. I appreciate that.

And, Captain, I have got another question for you. Everybody in this room is familiar with the FAA's issues with outdated air traffic control equipment. In your testimony, you say that the FAA must move faster to address these concerns. But in your view, what, if anything, is preventing the FAA from moving quickly to modernize

ATC equipment, particularly in light of congressional support for equipment modernization and recent directives from the Secretary?

Mr. REVEN. So to me, it is appropriations. So we have got the bill. We have decided how much money we have got to spend, but now we have got to responsibly put it where it needs to be to get those folks—and delays—I have heard this in the military a ton of times, and you have all heard this, freedom isn't free. But I would say the same thing is even more so about safety.

We have got to get the funds out there and get the money spent and get the projects underway as fast as possible to avoid another mishap.

Mr. MCDOWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. WIED. The gentleman yields back.

I now recognize Ms. Gillen for 5 minutes.

Ms. GILLEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of our witnesses here today.

Chronic underinvestment and lack of focus on the New York airspace poses a serious threat to the safety of our region and to our country. Multiple times over the past few weeks, radar and communication systems that help controllers direct planes in and out of Newark Airport failed for as long as 90 seconds at a time, leaving controllers unable to see or talk to planes in the area, and resulting in major delays, cancellations, and leaving passengers stranded. These failures could have had deadly consequences and caused extreme mental anguish to the folks working in the TRACON and in the air traffic control space.

I am proud to represent New York's Fourth Congressional District on the South Shore of Long Island and New York's air traffic control facilities, including TRACON N90 is in my district and is one of the most outdated and understaffed in the country. Yet it manages the Nation's most complex airspace.

We must do more to address our outdated infrastructure and bring New York and our national airspace into the 21st century.

I recently led a bipartisan group of my colleagues in sending a letter to the House Appropriations Committee urging the inclusion of critical language in the fiscal year 2026 appropriation bill to prioritize New York airspace for modernization, to increase efficiency, reduce congestion, and maximize runway capacity to better serve air traffic needs and keep our skies safe.

Mr. Chairman, I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record this letter.

Mr. NEHLS [presiding]. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

Letter of May 23, 2025, to Hon. Steve Womack, Chairman, and Hon. James E. Clyburn, Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, House Committee on Appropriations, from Eight Congress Members from New York and New Jersey, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Laura Gillen

CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES,
WASHINGTON, DC 20515,
MAY 23, 2025.

The Honorable STEVE WOMACK,
Chairman,
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, House Committee on Appropriations, Washington, DC 20515.

The Honorable JAMES E. CLYBURN,
Ranking Member,
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies, House Committee on Appropriations, Washington, DC 20515.

DEAR CHAIRMAN WOMACK AND RANKING MEMBER CLYBURN:

As you prepare the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2026, we write to request the inclusion of crucial report language to address increasing public concerns about the safety and efficiency of the northeastern airspace, particularly around New York and New Jersey airports and Air Traffic Control (ATC) facilities—including the TRACON N90 facility. We recommend the following language that prioritizes modernization of our nation's most vulnerable regions including New York, while also increasing efficiency, reducing congestion, and maximizing runway capacity to better serve air traveler needs.

New York's ATC facilities are among the most outdated and understaffed [1] in the country yet manage the nation's most complex airspace. The complexity and volume of the New York airspace significantly increases the risk of operational disruptions, especially given the outdated or unreliable infrastructure. In addition, New York ATC facilities are not utilizing [2] the most modern and efficient navigation technology, even though other parts of the country and the world have implemented them successfully.

The lack of investment and focus on New York's airspace poses a serious threat to the safety of our region and our country. Outdated infrastructure has led to frequent telecommunications outages and service interruptions that have brought the region's air traffic operations to a standstill. In just the last few weeks, radar and communications systems that help controllers direct planes in and out of Newark Liberty International Airport failed for as long as ninety seconds at a time, leaving controllers unable to see or talk to planes in the area, and resulting in major delays and cancellations leaving passengers stranded. This catastrophic system failure could have had deadly consequences. Such failures represent a system wide vulnerability that affects not only the New York area but also the broader national airspace. At its peak, flights that interacted with the New York airspace accounted for up to 70 percent of delays nationwide.

To bring the New York airspace into the 21st century, keep our flights on time, and keep Americans safe, we ask the Committee to take action and include the language below in its FY2026 report.

PRIORITIZING OUR MOST VULNERABLE FACILITIES FOR MODERNIZATION INITIATIVES

Although the FAA has initiated various modernization projects and staffing initiatives across the country, New York's ATC facilities have often been left out. This lack of prioritization further delays the much-needed upgrades to systems, equipment, and personnel that are critical for safe and efficient air traffic management in the most vulnerable region of our National Airspace System (NAS). The investment in new, modern facilities and other operational improvements in this region would yield disproportionate benefits for both domestic and international aviation and should be prioritized over other, less vulnerable regions.

Therefore, we request the inclusion of the following report language:

The Committee remains deeply concerned about the vulnerability of aging air traffic control (ATC) infrastructure, particularly in the New York region,

[1] https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/06/11/2024-12690/staffing-related-relief-concerning-operations-at-ronald-reagan-washington-national-airport-john-f

[2] https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/56236

which is responsible for managing the most complex and congested airspace in the National Airspace System (NAS). Persistent outages, outdated telecommunications systems, and insufficient staffing in this region have repeatedly triggered national ripple effects, accounting for a significant share of delays across the country. While the FAA has initiated modernization efforts elsewhere, the Committee finds that investment has not been sufficiently prioritized based on systemic risk and operational impact.

The Committee recommends that the FAA update its 2023 Operational Risk Assessment to identify and rank the most vulnerable ATC facilities, using criteria that include but are not limited to: airspace complexity, delay frequency, system-wide impact, traffic growth, runway limitations, and the region's role as a domestic and international throughput hub. The FAA is further directed to prioritize modernization projects—including telecommunications infrastructure, decision-support tools, facilities upgrades, and staffing and training programs—at facilities that present the highest vulnerability and potential return on investment in terms of operational improvement.

The FAA shall submit a report to the Committees on Appropriations, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate within 180 days of enactment of this Act detailing: (1) the updated facility vulnerability assessment, (2) the projects selected for prioritized implementation, and (3) an explanation of how prioritization decisions were made.

This measure would require the FAA to address the most challenging sectors of the NAS, rather than those that are the easiest to implement in and correspondingly yield less operational improvement. It would prioritize investment in the busiest, most complex, and vulnerable airspace which would concentrate modernization efforts to where there are the most operational disruptions. These requirements would help ensure that the significant federal investment in the NAS is being optimized.

INCREASING EFFICIENCY AT NEW YORK AIRPORTS

New York ATC facilities are not utilizing the most modern and efficient airspace navigation technology, even though airlines have invested millions of dollars to equip their aircraft and train their pilots with this capability. For example, Required Navigation Performance (RNP) technology enables airplanes to follow precise routes instead of operating over a broader geography that requires more direction from controllers. This established technology is already operational in other parts of the country but it is underutilized in New York. Most airplanes are already equipped with this technology, and the mixed equipment adds to the complexity for already busy air traffic controllers. Requiring aircraft to be equipped with RNP or equivalent technology during peak hours would streamline operations.

Therefore, we request the inclusion of the following report language:

The Committee is concerned by the underutilization of advanced air traffic procedures in the New York terminal area, which may improve management of this congested airspace. For instance, Required Navigation Performance (RNP), an advanced form of Performance Based Navigation (PBN), has been successfully deployed in other high-density regions to help enhance safety and operational efficiency by enabling more precise and predictable aircraft routing. Given the chronic controller staffing shortages and complexity of the New York airspace, the Committee believes that implementation of more advanced procedures, such as RNP, during peak traffic periods could yield operational benefits.

The Committee recommends that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) establish a pilot to determine the feasibility of using RNP capabilities for aircraft operations during peak hours in New York's airspace. The Committee further directs the FAA to report to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate within 180 days of enactment of this Act on the design and proposed implementation timeline of the pilot program, and to provide an assessment of its operational and safety impacts within one year of initiation.

This pilot program would prompt full implementation of the wide-ranging short-term and long-term airspace improvements that have been postponed for decades.

Limiting this pilot program to peak hours, when the highest number of aircraft are moving through the ATC system, would boost efficiency at periods when ATC personnel are the most strained, while still enabling nonequipped aircraft that require more guidance to land in off-peak periods. In the short term, requiring standardization in landing and takeoff patterns during high volume traffic periods is one way to enhance safety by constructing a more predictable airspace. This streamlining of operations could also lead to a reduction of delay programs during peak hours.

STUDY ON INNOVATIVE ARRIVAL SPACING TECHNOLOGY IN NEW YORK

Arrival spacing tools, such as Intelligent Approach, safely optimize runway capacity to improve operational resilience and deliver better on-time performance. In other parts of the world, Intelligent Approach technology is helping controllers to safely increase efficiency and maximize available runway capacity. Although this new technology is operational outside of the United States, the FAA has been reluctant to begin understanding how it can help address crowded airspace in areas like New York. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, operator of John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK), LaGuardia Airport (LGA), and Newark Liberty International Airport (EWR), has already advocated for this technology as an eventual solution to the limited runway capacity in New York.

Therefore, we request the inclusion of the following report language:

The Committee notes the international innovative arrival spacing tools in optimizing runway throughput and improving on-time performance in high-traffic environments. However, the FAA has not yet conducted a comprehensive evaluation of this technology for potential use in U.S. airspace. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey has identified this technology as a potential solution for enhancing operational resilience at its commercial service airports.

The Committee encourages the FAA, in coordination with airport operators, air carriers, labor representatives, and relevant stakeholders, to evaluate and develop an implementation strategy for the potential use of innovative arrival spacing tools, including Intelligent Approach technology, in the New York airspace. The FAA shall report to the Committees on Appropriations, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate within one year of enactment of this Act the study, and shall provide a final report within four years outlining findings and recommendations for implementation.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We look forward to working with the Committee to ensure that the New York Airspace, and our NAS more broadly, have the resources they need to keep maximize efficiency and keep Americans safe.

Sincerely,

LAURA A. GILLEN,
Member of Congress.
NICHOLAS A. LANGWORTHY,
Member of Congress.
JERROLD NADLER,
Member of Congress.
JOSH GOTTHEIMER,
Member of Congress.
NYDIA M. VELÁZQUEZ,
Member of Congress.
DAN GOLDMAN,
Member of Congress.
GREGORY W. MEEKS,
Member of Congress.
THOMAS R. SUOZZI,
Member of Congress.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you.

So, Ms. Nelson, you mentioned the recent issues at Newark in your testimony. As your union pointed out last month, experts have been sounding the alarm for decades that the infrastructure must be rebuilt and must be modernized. How have your union members been impacted by the chronic underinvestment in the New York airspace over the past few years, and what can Congress do to further facilitate the modernization effort?

Thank you, Ms. Nelson.

Ms. NELSON. Thank you. So when flights are delayed or canceled, flight attendants are deterred from their schedules too. This can have an impact on our pay. It can have an impact on just getting

home to our families and doing our duties at home. And ultimately what happens is that our air traffic controllers are not going to run an unsafe system, so they are going to slow down the capacity. That will have major economic impacts on the New York area and, frankly, on the rest of the country. So much of our air traffic flows in and out of the New York area.

Specifically, the flight attendants who are based there have now lost their schedules in many cases because capacity had to be cut. That means that they are losing hours and opportunity for pay. It also means that they are often delayed many, many hours from getting home or rerouted or have other disruptions to their lives.

So we have concerns, first and foremost, of course, for safety, and we thank our air traffic controllers for making sure that they always keep that safe for us, but we have got to do more.

And we support your letter to the Appropriations Committee to get this money out and get these programs going as quickly as possible. We are way behind here and it is—I am glad that everyone is paying attention now, but we have been screaming it from the rooftops for over a decade.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Ms. Nelson.

Mr. Bolen, in 2022, you submitted written testimony to this committee on some of the work your association is doing to mitigate the impact of aviation noise on local communities. In that testimony, you mentioned the importance of the FAA's Next Generation Air Transportation System initiative, or NextGen.

In last year's bipartisan FAA Reauthorization Act, Congress required the FAA to expedite the implementation of a number of NextGen programs and to develop a plan to accelerate the acquisition rates of NextGen systems in commercial aircraft fleets. Unfortunately, the FAA has failed to meet its deadline, leaving communities like mine vulnerable to the harmful impacts of aviation noise.

How important is it that the FAA implement this provision, and what else can we do to mitigate the impacts of aviation noise?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think that what we have seen is that when we began focusing on flight plans, the idea was to bring everything together so that everything would be neat. The problem with that is it has exacerbated some of the noise over specific areas. So we have done intentional displacements to try to spread that and make the impact less significant.

But we do see that there are opportunities to potentially hold aircraft higher longer is one of the ways that we believe that that noise impact can be reduced. We also believe deeply in working with the communities to make sure we understand what their concerns are and they understand what the pilots are safe flying through as well. We don't want to compromise safety, but we do want to fly friendly, and that is why we have set up a number of working groups at various airports. Teterboro Users Group, for example, is one of those where we work to have a dialogue, and the FAA has helped facilitate that.

But clearly, there is more work to do to find the proper balance between flying safely and flying as a good neighbor.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you.

And just following up on that, in terms of crowded airspace like the airspace over my district where you have flights coming into LaGuardia, to JFK—also in that airspace is Newark as well—is it possible to mitigate noise with rerouting since it is such a crowded airspace?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, obviously, that congestion creates challenges, and that is, as you have articulated, some of the busiest and most complex airspace in the country. I think, again, focusing on how do we operate safely but where can we find additional ways to be more neighborly is an appropriate endeavor.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields.

I now recognize Dr. Onder for 5 minutes.

Dr. ONDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks to all the witnesses here today.

Mr. Pleasance, you raised serious concerns about the misuse of ADS–B data in lawsuits and fee collection. Could you elaborate on the privacy and safety risks of these practices?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Absolutely. Aircraft equipped with ADS–B basically put out a signal that includes a lot of information. It could be altitude, the speed of the aircraft, as well as the registration number, the N-Number of the aircraft, and that is essentially visible to anybody who has got a receiver to receive that data, which is very easily obtained.

And we are now beginning to see increasing evidence. There was one not that long ago up in the Seattle area, just north of Seattle, for example, where an individual was served with a lawsuit for an aircraft that had flown over his house, not low. He was up at several thousand feet. But because the person on the ground is not someone who enjoys aircraft, he got the ADS–B data, was able to identify who that was that was flying the airplane, and filed a lawsuit for harassment.

And he won't win the lawsuit, but that is an example of the burden on that pilot where in a sense his privacy has been violated, and he is now having to defend what was a completely legal activity.

Dr. ONDER. Yes, I face—I am a pilot myself, and one day, a fellow pilot came over to my hangar and told me a story. This is Spirit of St. Louis Airport in Chesterfield. And yes, he flew about 2,000 feet above a plane, and he got a demand letter, not a lawsuit but a demand letter.

I understand also there are cases of airports or FBOs using ADS–B data to enforce landing fees. Is this——

Mr. PLEASANCE [interrupting]. Correct. There is increasing prevalence of that around the country where because the ADS–B, as I said earlier, can be collected by essentially anybody, that data is being used to assess various forms of fees. Oftentimes, it is landing fees.

And our concern is less that an airport charges landing fees. They are allowed to do that. We do care about them being fair and reasonable. Our bigger concern is the fact that ADS–B data is being used for that, which creates a deterrent. If you are a pilot that has not yet implemented ADS–B in your aircraft, you hear these stories, whether it is about these frivolous lawsuits or about

collection of fees, and it becomes a disincentive to employing that technology on your aircraft.

And we at AOPA are very supportive of ADS–B. It is a good technology. It does increase safety in the airspace system, and we would like to see more people choosing to employ it, and these kinds of activities are directly against that, which, in the end, ultimately reduce safety.

Dr. ONDER. And, of course, ADS–B—and maybe you could elaborate on this—isn't required everywhere.

Mr. PLEASANCE. Correct.

Dr. ONDER. But, as the AOPA, as a private pilot, the FAA, we would like to see pilots using it everywhere. But, in a way, we are creating an incentive—this cottage industry monetizing—because it is my understanding that businesses are coming to FBOs and the airports and saying, "Look, we will help you enforce your landing fees with ADS–B data." We are creating an incentive for not only pilots who maybe have older planes that don't have ADS–B data now, but also planes that do, pilots to turn the ADS–B off by flipping the breaker.

Mr. PLEASANCE. Yes. Yes, that can happen. We, of course, don't encourage that.

Dr. ONDER. Of course not.

Mr. PLEASANCE. We don't like that to happen.

Dr. ONDER. Of course not.

Mr. PLEASANCE. But that does create an incentive in the system for those kinds of behaviors.

And you are right, ADS–B is not required everywhere. There are many places out in the middle of the country that are far from other airports and far from other aircraft. And so there are still a number of airplanes that do not have ADS–B installed. And the kinds of activities that we are talking about here are absolutely a deterrent to putting that technology in.

Dr. ONDER. So the AOPA has expressed concern about a patchwork of State laws to restrict ADS–B data misuse. How many and which States have implemented their own laws to address this issue?

Mr. PLEASANCE. It's early days, but Montana, for example, just passed a law that prohibits the use of ADS–B for collecting of landing fees—or fees in general——

Dr. ONDER [interposing]. Right.

Mr. PLEASANCE [continuing]. Not just landing fees.

I know it is going through the legislature in Minnesota at this time. I know there was a hearing on this exact topic in Pennsylvania just yesterday. And so it is beginning to basically expand around the country.

Of course, our concern is that—on one hand, we are happy that the States are taking notice of this and are concerned, as we are. We are also, though, concerned about a patchwork of different laws around the country that just create a level of complexity that is not as good as if this was a national——

Dr. ONDER [interrupting]. So this situation begs for a Federal approach?

Mr. PLEASANCE. I think so. Absolutely.

Dr. ONDER. Thank you.

Mr. PLEASANCE. Thank you.

Dr. ONDER. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Mr. Carbajal for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Nelson, our Nation's aviation workforce is critical to maintaining the safety of our Nation's airspace. This committee took action to assert the importance of this workforce by including various safety improvements in the bipartisan FAA reauthorization.

One of the issues that we took action on was the response to cabin air safety and dealing with the toxic fumes created by engine exhaust and fuel fumes. Congress required the FAA to create a system for in-flight crew and mechanics to report fume events.

Has the FAA moved forward with implementing this requirement?

Ms. NELSON. No.

Mr. CARBAJAL. And are they going to be doing that in the near future?

Ms. NELSON. So we hope that they are going to move on this more swiftly, because we need this reporting feature right now. We are taking those reports in through our union.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Are you aware of any timeline that they have come up with?

Ms. NELSON. I am not aware.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Ms. Nelson, as a member of this committee, we have heard from various stakeholders about the impacts the indiscriminate budget and staffing cuts have had on aviation safety.

One of the issues you flag are the cuts to the National Weather Service. For the benefit of everyone here and everyone listening, can you elaborate further on how cuts by DOGE to the National Weather Service impact safety?

Ms. NELSON. Yes. And I have an update to my testimony as well, because shining a spotlight on this has appeared that there has been an effort to try to restore the vacant positions that were created by DOGE with these incentives for people to leave. But we are bringing on new people to fill these positions who have not been trained, who will have to get up to speed.

And the problem is that we need to be providing real-time updates to ATC and to our pilots and our dispatchers about these weather conditions so that we can predict this and start planning in advance. So this undercuts our ability to plan and also to address issues like trying to plan to avoid turbulence, which is a major, major threat in my workplace for very serious injury.

Mr. CARBAJAL. So it increases safety risks?

Ms. NELSON. It increases safety risks, yes.

And I do appreciate, though, the focus on this, because it appears that the pressure is working to try to fix this. But in an effort to create efficiencies, we have created an incredible inefficiency, because now we are replacing these positions with people who need to be trained up and get up to speed on how to do the work.

And so, if they would have just slowed down and talked to the people on the front lines about how to make these systems better

and work efficiently, as we have done in the past, we may have had a better outcome here.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Well, thank you. I think you highlight the fact that, in the pursuit of finding efficiencies, the process was way inefficient to do so. So, I appreciate you sharing that.

Ms. NELSON. Inefficient and unsafe. It added safety risk, I should say.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you very much.

Mr. Pleasance, we know that we need to modernize our air traffic control system. The system needs to continue to enhance safety and promote innovation.

Can you elaborate further from your organization's perspective on why we need to modernize this system?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Absolutely.

The challenges we face today are decades in the making. This is not something that occurred since January or even in the last 5 or 10 years.

We, as a Nation, have built, I call it, a patchwork of technologies that enable the airspace system to operate today. As has been said earlier, it is the safest airspace system in the world, so, it has worked.

However, because it is a patchwork and you have got technologies some of which are decades old—and I have seen the evidence of floppy disks being used—you have got a network—and I am an IT guy by background. I spent 20 years in the IT industry. We have allowed ourselves, probably because of funding-related constraints and others, to build a patchwork of technologies that are incredibly expensive to maintain because of the gap in new technology and old technology and having to have them all work together.

And we have not taken, I will call it, a holistic view on what should the future of general aviation look like—or, not general aviation, but the future of the air traffic control system look like, and how do we put in place a system that actually is built for a purpose, including eliminating the old technologies that, to date, we have dragged along from year to year to year and, with it, an enormous amount of overhead and maintenance costs.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Are you aware that, as part of the reconciliation, the fees were raised on hybrids and electric vehicles, but only half of the money is going towards modernizing some of our systems, the other half is actually going for other things?

Mr. PLEASANCE. I was not aware of that, no.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Mr. Chair, I am out of time. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Mr. Mann for 5 minutes.

Mr. MANN. Thank you, Chairman Nehls, and thanks for having this hearing today.

Thank you all again for being here and being willing to testify.

I represent the First District—the Big First district of Kansas. Aviation is a critical industry in Kansas, as you all know, with roughly 100 general aviation airports, several commercial and re-

gional airports, a huge footprint in aviation and aerospace manufacturing.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 included critical provisions to ensure that our aviation industries are able to improve services, bolster our workforce, and promote American innovation.

Just a handful of questions for you, Mr. Bolen.

As you know firsthand, Kansas plays a vital role in general aviation, from aircraft manufacturing to training our next generation of pilots. As we look back 1 year after FAA reauthorization, where do you see the most critical opportunities or shortcomings in implementing workforce provisions, particularly those workforce provisions aimed at strengthening technical education and expanding aviation careers in the rural part of our country?

Mr. BOLEN. Yes, I think the bill was excellent in outlining the importance of workforce and in funding certain grant programs. The aviation maintenance technician program and the pilot pathway program are two outstanding examples of the focus on aviation careers that is necessary.

And I think what we are seeing in Kansas is a good example. Salina particularly, with Kansas State Salina, with its focus on emerging technologies—AAM, unmanned systems—shows that, as our industry is evolving, so too are the career opportunities.

I think the hard part for us is making sure people are aware of those opportunities. I think a lot of people do not see themselves as part of aviation, but particularly as new technologies are coming in, that has the ability to captivate and motivate people. I think we are seeing this as advanced air mobility is really beginning to draw attention. Drones, commercial space launch—there are a lot of opportunities.

The more people are aware of it, the more we have an ability to recruit, develop, and retain the best and the brightest, wherever they are from.

Mr. MANN. I agree.

Which goes right into my next question. You mentioned Salina, where you grew up, my hometown. Salina has become a test bed for emerging aviation technologies, including unmanned systems and advanced air mobility.

A year after FAA reauthorization, how well, in your view, has the agency done in supporting innovation hubs like Salina by providing the regulatory clarity and infrastructure support needed to scale these technologies and ensure long-term industry competitiveness?

Mr. BOLEN. Yes, I think what we are seeing is, the FAA is recognizing the importance of innovation and the importance of bringing new technologies forward.

And so, whether it is signing the SFAR to enable advanced air mobility operations or the focus that we are seeing placed by this administration on things like the drone technologies, coming forward with the BVLOS rules, I think all of that suggests that there is a need for hubs, as we like to call them, places where industry, academia, and Government can come together. And Kansas State Salina is an example of that.

Mr. MANN. Yes. Yes.

Last question, again for you, Mr. Bolen. A little different direction.

In your testimony, you discussed the urgent need to overhaul our Nation's air traffic control system, which this committee has talked a lot about. You brought up the topic of ATC privatization. You mentioned Nav Canada is often hailed as an example of a system that works but that it actually overpromises and underdelivers.

What did you mean by that?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think there are a couple things inherent in that.

One, ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organization, has done a safety audit of Canada, and what they concluded was that it was operating, on a scale of 100, at about 65 percent. It is the lowest rating of any G7 country, and it is lower than 38 other countries. So safety is an issue. And they talk about the inability of Transport Canada to really oversee Nav Canada, the air traffic system.

We also see reports coming out about terrible shortages in air traffic controllers, delays that are coming out. We saw just last week a pilot got on the microphone and said, "We are being delayed because we don't have enough air traffic controllers." And then it focused on an operator and owner of a small airport in Vancouver that talked about "20-minute to 2-hour delays are routine," and they are only flying 20-minute legs.

Mr. MANN. Ah.

Mr. BOLEN. So I think a lot has gotten ahead of itself about what they have in Canada. The reality is, the United States has the largest, the safest, the most efficient, and the most diverse mix of aircraft and operations in the world. This is about finding ways that America, our innovation, and our ingenuity can take us forward.

Mr. MANN. Yes.

Well, thank you for the insights, and thank you all for being here.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Mr. García for 5 minutes.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Chairman, Ranking Member, and, of course, the witnesses here today.

Ms. Nelson, I appreciate you including in your testimony an update on section 438 of the FAA bill, requiring the GAO to complete a review of airport service workforce. And they have committed to comply with its due date later this year.

I agree with you, airport workers are the foundation of our air travel system, and for too long, they have been denied a living wage and benefits like paid time off or healthcare.

GAO recently updated us on this review, and they stated that it would be formally issued in September.

Of course, this is just the first step. A public working group needs to be convened by DOT to discuss the report's findings and inform ways to further support this workforce.

Ms. Nelson, why is it important that the Department of Transportation convene this working group to discuss the analysis, one? And why are better wage and benefit standards, as my Good Jobs

for Good Airports bill would accomplish, important for our air travel system?

Ms. NELSON. Thank you very much for the question, Congressman García.

So, first and foremost, every single person, from the people who are working in the kitchens to the people who are pushing the wheelchairs, they are all part of the safety ecosystem. And, in many cases, these are jobs that are low-paid, usually without benefits.

What we see is that, when workers can get a credential to work at the airport, that oftentimes they will get jobs doing several different things in the airport and sleep at the gates in between shifts. This is a problem with fatigue, with missing something, with making a mistake. It also leaves us vulnerable, because people become desperate. And so it is not good safety culture to set people up for failure in their lives.

And I have real concerns just in terms of aviation and how we are lifting everyone up in that space and helping everyone understand that we are doing something together. We can't do something together when some people are treated as second- and third-class citizens, without benefits, without the ability to pay for their homes, and without public transportation to be able to get back and forth between their homes.

They oftentimes will go days without seeing their families because they can't afford to go home and come back for these shifts that they have to work in order to just keep people fed and in a home oftentimes with many families.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Ms. Nelson.

Recent incidents, including the tragic collision over DCA, remind us how urgent it is for full implementation of the FAA bill.

At Midway Airport in my district in Chicago earlier this year, a Southwest Airlines flight had to perform a go-around to avoid a jet that had crossed the runway. I am grateful for the pilots and the actions taken to avoid a potential disaster.

It is another reminder of the importance of upholding strong safety standards in our aviation system. This includes updating obsolete equipment. The surface surveillance radar used at Midway Airport is composed of parts that are no longer being made, forcing the airport to look for replacement parts at other airports.

Captain Reven, can you tell us what can be done to prevent runway incursions like the one that occurred at Midway in the future?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

You hit it on the head to start with. The surveillance equipment has got to be updated. The line of sight has got to be worked out with the towers.

One of the things I heard in the testimony before this body last was a very disturbing—we spend 90 percent on our legacy equipment and 10 percent on innovation. That has to change.

And then the last one I would put the plug for: It is absolutely essential to have two pilots in a commercial aircraft, a two-pilot complement, this pilot monitoring.

And then, also, there were some things that came out of that where there was an narrative that, "Oh, the pilots were disregarding somehow the air traffic controller, and they need to be

punished." Like I said, it's a collaboration, it's teamwork, it's a positive safety culture of reporting and learning from one another—so all of those kind of holistically together.

But the 90 percent/10 percent was really alarming to hear from the air traffic controllers testifying in this last hearing. We have to get that shifted.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you.

And, again, thanks to all the witnesses.

My time is up. I yield back, Chairman.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Mr. Knott for 5 minutes.

Mr. KNOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To the witnesses, thank you all for being here. This has been a very productive discussion.

I have some questions that I would love to ask, but, before that, let me just reiterate that, from my district, the 13th of North Carolina, there are small airports all over my district, all over the State. They are regional airports, North Carolina, even international airports. And we certainly appreciate all the contributions that each of you make to having a safer aviation environment.

I will want to discuss this, though. There is obviously the need to discuss appropriations, but there is also the need to discuss the efficiencies.

And, Captain, you just mentioned that we are committed to antiquated technologies and so forth. And, internally, it seems like there are some very real inefficiencies and some sluggishness.

And in terms of rebuilding the processes internally so that the FAA can have more flexibility, I would love to go down that line, if we could.

And, Mr. Bolen, I will start with you. Given your experience, what are some ways that, I mean, quite literally, we can avoid having to require an act of Congress to go from floppy disks to cloud servers? Like, how can we give the flexibility needed to the agency to modernize and progress?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think the FAA bill gave some pretty clear directions on the importance of digitization of a number of the processes. We literally had a situation where a piece of paper could be buried on a desk and people weren't coming to the office so nothing was going anywhere. The digitization is going to be a big help.

I think some of the leadership is also really important. We have talked about the medicals, for example. And I know the flight surgeon, Dr. Northrup, has talked about how important it is to be able to track where your things are. You shouldn't be able to know more about a pizza being delivered to your home than where your medical is——

Mr. KNOTT [interposing]. Right.

Mr. BOLEN [continuing]. In the process. So I think those are some of the opportunities.

And then I think what has been described as kind of the "build the new system" and be able to gather all of the efficiencies from better connectivity, better situational awareness throughout the system.

Mr. KNOTT. What are the ways to check and to make sure that those implementations are being done efficiently so that we don't add to the waste, but we remove waste, in your experience?

Mr. BOLEN. And I think that is exactly what we are doing here today. When this oversight committee brings oversight and is able specifically, like you were a couple weeks ago, to ask the FAA, "Where is this report that said you will do the following things?"

And I think what you are asking them to do is very intentional to drive results that are going to increase safety and increase efficiency.

Mr. KNOTT. Yes.

Mr. Pleasance, I want to ask you a few questions. I saw in your biography that you are a former bush pilot in Alaska. And there are lots of small-plane pilots in North Carolina. I have had the chance to use bush pilots in Alaska. They are the best pilots in the world, in many respects.

In your opinion, is the FAA sufficiently accommodating those, sort of, legacy pilots with freedom and flexibility and really avoiding the sophistication required to go through a bureaucratic rigmarole that seems to be the case for newer, younger pilots?

Mr. PLEASANCE. I think so in general. I mean, the current environment, especially as MOSAIC, I hope, gets across the line this summer, there have been innovations like MOSAIC that will make it easier for young pilots to get into aviation and learn in small aircraft that lower the overall cost, the burden basically, to become a pilot.

I think the rules in general so far have remained quite open to making it easy for people who do want to do back-country flying. You have organizations like the Recreational Aviation Foundation whose whole mission is to preserve these back-country airports around the world—or, around the country.

Mr. KNOTT. Yes.

Mr. PLEASANCE. And I think they have done a good job. And the FAA, from what I have seen, has so far been generally supportive of that.

Mr. KNOTT. Great. And if that ever ceases to be the case, I trust you will let us know.

Mr. PLEASANCE. Oh, we would raise that very quickly.

Mr. KNOTT. Yes, sir.

Mr. PLEASANCE. One thing I might add, if you don't mind, just to Mr. Bolen's comment, too.

You asked about efficiency, and from an IT perspective, I do think there is a preponderance of intention in the FAA, historically at least, to customize what gets put in. Everything has to be just exactly the way they need it. And having done a lot of work in IT over the years, to the extent that they can take more commercial off-the-shelf and not try to customize every single thing, that will be an important step forward and a more efficient implementation of the systems.

Mr. KNOTT. Yes.

Captain Reven, just briefly, I have heard from numerous pilots that there is a great need for the medical office reform in the FAA, that they still utilize snail mail, which was just astounding to me

to hear, and that pilots can be placed on inadvertent leave for 6, 7 weeks just from a process standpoint.

How can we improve that process for the pilots?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Congressman.

First, I would like to take exception to your comment about bush pilots being the best pilots.

[Laughter.]

After that, I would say that that work is underway. There is improvement. And like Ms. Nelson said earlier, these problems are 10 years old.

Mr. KNOTT. Yes.

Mr. REVEN. We are starting to, kind of, see the light. With this 53-person coalition, we are all kind of pulling from the same side of the rope now, and we are seeing great improvements.

Some of the ones that we have seen at Southwest Airlines, some of our pain points have been deferrals versus denials and then just the timeliness of, hey, what do I need to get in to make sure that my physical is deferred. And, unfortunately, that could come at a time where your physical is due.

Mr. KNOTT. Yes.

Mr. REVEN. So you are not on any type of benefit, but you are sitting at home without a qualification.

So, Dr. Northrup's office has been fantastic about trying to work these onesie-twosies. But we still have that situation in the pipeline where it is one big stack with both general aviation and with professional aviators. So we are trying to kind of work through that with her office.

Mr. KNOTT. Great. Thank you, sir.

My time is over. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Ms. Pou for 5 minutes.

Ms. POU. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am very happy that this committee is continuing to focus on the critical issue of airline safety by ensuring full implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act.

Last month, I was proud to join the subcommittee chair, the vice chair, and the ranking member in seeking robust funding for FAA operations and for the equipment that they use to safely direct flights.

This is in addition to the emergency supplemental funding I called for, with many of my New Jersey colleagues, to address the technology and equipment failures that have lead to the delays and chaos at the Newark Airport. This funding is absolutely vital in helping to resolve the disruption at Newark and airports around the country.

I appreciate all of our witnesses for highlighting the continued need for FAA to implement critical provisions from their reauthorization.

Mr. Bolen, if I may start with you, I represent Teterboro Airport, which is an important business aviation hub. The breakdown at the Philadelphia TRACON has impacted airports around the Northeast, including Teterboro.

Is FAA doing enough to manage the telecom failures in the short and long term? And how will modernizing the air traffic control im-

prove communication systems and the subsequent effects of these systems' breakdown?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think, when we look at Newark, we understand that the failure largely was a result of copper wires. There were two lines of redundancy. We now are adding a third line; we are bringing in fiber optics.

So, in that specific instance, I think we are moving forward. And I think that's an example of what we need to be doing across the country, making sure that we have the infrastructure, whether it's fiber, whether it's radios, whether it's radar.

I do think we will also have an opportunity, because situational awareness will improve, we will be able to be more precise in how we are moving the aircraft. And while congestion is congestion, we will be able to see more opportunities to have more precise routings that can allow different options to be able to shorten ground holds and to be able to move forward.

Ms. POU. All right. Well, thank you. Thank you for that.

Quickly—and I know—I want to just try—I have several questions, so I am going to quickly go to Captain Reven.

You have advocated for air traffic controllers to have access to the flight deck as part of their training. How would that improve safety? And how do you believe Congress can help in that regard?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman.

It is about teamwork. As I said earlier, this is an orchestrated ground ops, pilots, flight attendants, air traffic control all safely taking you from A to B.

We do this with our dispatchers. Our dispatchers ride upfront. And so the messages they send us, the weight and balance they provide, the fuel—they are able to see, when they ride on a quarterly basis, what it is we are looking at on our side of the radio. And it helps us to form that, sort of, shared mental model of how we are doing business.

The same thing could be done—and air traffic controllers used to be able to do this—where they would ride in the cockpit, and they are giving us instructions, but now they can see what we see on our screen.

Ms. POU. Right.

Mr. REVEN. And so it is very helpful for that teamwork type of model that we have for them to be able to have that access.

So, what you could do would be to expedite the security process that they would go through to be able to do that.

Ms. POU. Thank you. Thank you so very much.

And, quickly, I have this question for Ms. Nelson.

In your testimony, you highlighted two provisions in the reauthorization where you aren't aware of any progress from FAA, with regards to the turbulence-related injuries and radiation exposure.

Can you please share how these risks can, in fact, harm crewmembers and what type of information you are hoping to see included in the required reports?

Ms. NELSON. Thank you very much for the question.

Turbulence is a very, very serious injury, potential injury, in the cabin. And we have a lot of flight attendants who are harmed by this. So implementing these procedures and best practices is critically important if we want to keep injury rates down and if we

want to move forward to try to avoid the potential of injury for passengers as well.

In terms of the radiation, we do almost nothing in this country. And as I said earlier, there is a radiation exposure form that you could go to and check your potential radiation exposure on the FAA site. That link is currently not working. So we are going backwards instead of forwards with the bill.

Ms. POU. Well, that is a shame, and we certainly need to do something about that. Thank you so very much.

Oh, it looks like I still have, real quickly——

Mr. NEHLS [interrupting]. You are actually on the other side of that.

Ms. POU. Oh, I am sorry. No?

Mr. NEHLS. No. You are over.

Ms. POU. I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you so very much.

Mr. Begich, you are recognized.

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just a few stats about my home State of Alaska. Eighty-two percent of communities are not on a road system. Three hundred and ninety-one public use airports. We have the second most airports of any State in the United States, but we are 48th in terms of population. So air service is essential in Alaska.

I appreciate the committee holding this important hearing on the Federal Aviation Administration, as safe and efficient air transportation is important for all Americans.

Specifically, I want to point out that Essential Air Service is critical for 65 rural and remote communities in my home State of Alaska. EAS is vital for rural connectivity, access to healthcare, and economic development.

This program supports communities across my State like Adak, Akutan, and Saint Paul, and many other remote locations that lack any viable alternative transportation options. The program sustains access to basic services and economic opportunities in regions that otherwise would be cut off entirely.

It is also important to point out that many of the smaller and more remote airports in Alaska and in the rest of the United States are close to and serve the regions where major oil and gas, mineral, timber, fisheries, and other resource development activities take place or will take place as we unleash our energy potential.

So, with that as a backdrop, first, I am going to start with Mr. Pleasance.

Alaska's unique dependence on aviation for daily life and economic activity is unlike any other State, as you are well acquainted. What are the most critical FAA investments or policy actions that can directly improve safety and service reliability for Alaska's rural communities?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Great. Thank you for the question.

Yes, there is no more beautiful place in the world than Alaska. And I had the privilege of living in Talkeetna for a while, and Anchorage, and then essentially getting to see almost the entire State—never quite as far as Adak, but almost everywhere else.

As you said, it is a very expansive geography, and so access to weather information is one of the most critical technologies that

could be implemented. And I know the FAA has been doing that, but I think there is more that could be done, whether that is the ASOS at airports that provide localized weather and real-time weather or the webcams that are increasingly being rolled out across the State that just make it easier to understand weather, especially through passes that get used by virtually every pilot going from west to east or east to west across the Alaska Range.

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you.

And just to expand on that a little bit, are there any policies or implementation areas where rural States like Alaska need additional flexibility or targeted resources to meet their safety and operational needs?

Mr. PLEASANCE. I mean, the one that I am most aware of right now would be around, for instance, this transition to unleaded fuels. There are some very unique requirements up in Alaska. Fuel is only delivered typically twice a year on barges when the rivers aren't frozen. And so getting replacements of fuels, as we make this transition to unleaded fuels, Alaska needs to be taken into consideration with a very unique understanding of the constraints that the State faces.

Mr. BEGICH. You are 100 percent right, and I appreciate you bringing that up. That is a top priority for us.

One additional question, and this one directed to Mr. Robbins.

Mr. Robbins, how might we leverage advanced aviation technologies like drones or hybrid aircraft to make EAS routes more sustainable and reliable in Alaska's challenging weather and geography?

Mr. ROBBINS. Yes. Thank you very much for that question, Congressman.

And, actually, in preparation for this hearing, I connected with Cathy Cahill, who is the director of the UAS test site in your State and truly—she has testified before this committee before—and truly a leader in trying to achieve exactly what you are talking about, which is being able to use drones and other autonomous systems in places that are otherwise dangerous or very hard to reach, whether that is for package delivery, whether that is for medical delivery.

There are some really unique use cases on emergency response as well as search and rescue, being able to put up high-altitude, long-range endurance autonomous systems to find people that are lost or to deliver something like an AED or something like that that's required.

So, Cathy is leading the way in Alaska and, frankly, throughout the entire country, and we are very proud of her leadership.

Mr. BEGICH. Well, I appreciate that, and I appreciate your due diligence in reaching out to her. She is a leader. She has testified before this committee. We certainly enjoy hearing from her when she has comments to share or new research to share.

And please reach out to our office if you see some ways that we could start working on some of these technologies together.

Mr. ROBBINS. There are some challenges, so we will reach out. Thank you, sir.

Mr. BEGICH. Thank you very much.

And, with that, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Ms. Scholten for 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Madam Ranking Member.

And welcome, to our distinguished panel of witnesses. We really appreciate your time today and your commitment to making our airways as strong and safe as they can be.

I am so proud of our committee's work on the bipartisan FAA reauthorization of 2024. At a time of immense gridlock and infighting in Washington, I often point to our work on that bill as a beacon of hope.

And it is more important now than ever that this law is swiftly implemented so that that good work does not go to waste. We have the safest and most complex aviation system in the world, and we have to work together to keep it that way.

So the committee's bipartisan FAA reauthorization included vital enhancements for the aviation workforce development program, as you well know. However, the implementation of this critical program seems to be lagging.

It is my understanding that the fourth round of applications submitted by the February deadline for the existing pilot and maintenance grants are now in limbo, with applicants being told that they will have to resubmit once a revised notice of funding opportunity is issued, whenever that may be.

Meanwhile, we have seen no movement in standing up the new aviation manufacturing elements of the program, something that is critically important to my district.

Mr. Pleasance, have you or members of your organization received any updates or insights from the FAA about the status of these workforce development initiatives? And if not, how is the delayed implementation hindering workforce development efforts that are necessary to bolster aviation safety?

Mr. PLEASANCE. So we have been part of the effort to embrace the workforce development intentions behind the language that was in the—I think it was the NCAA, National Center for the Advancement of Aviation. I don't believe it got implemented last year. It got included in what was sent to the Senate. So in the final bill, at least as I understand, it was not included.

However, we have been recipients of the grant coming out of those efforts, and we have our high school program, for example, that was mentioned earlier. We have had over 100,000 young individuals, high schoolers, who have gone through that program. And it touches on not just becoming a pilot, but all the various professions in the world of aviation, including maintenance.

So, in progress there. However, as I understand, it is nowhere near what was intended originally. And from what I understand, at least, the FAA is not set up currently to truly be able to implement this. They don't have the workforce themselves in place, the dedicated resources in place to actually execute on the intentions of this plan. So I think they are falling short.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Yes. And what, if any, impacts do you see that currently having now? Or if these delays continue, what impacts would you foresee?

Mr. PLEASANCE. Well, I think, yes, there are impacts now, in the sense that there are people who are not getting opportunities to develop skills that would allow them to participate in this aviation ecosystem you just described.

And as was said earlier by Mr. Bolen, there are people out there today that would absolutely benefit that just don't even know about these programs.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Yes.

Mr. PLEASANCE. So that is part of what we are doing at AOPA, is try to get the word out that there are enormous opportunities in the world of aviation.

There are programs like our high school program and others that seek to help educate these younger folks around the opportunities there, but there is a lot more that could be done. And I think this program that is not yet fully going is a gap.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. I couldn't agree more, the need in the workforce and the incredible opportunity that it would provide for so many of our young people. Well, we will keep asking the questions——

Mr. PLEASANCE [interposing]. Please.

Ms. SCHOLTEN [continuing]. And doing what we can to provide the oversight to move these programs ahead.

One more question. My district is home to several innovative domestic aviation manufacturers, as I referenced in my question. Unfortunately, the administration's imprecise trade policies, including the President's recent calls to double tariffs on imported steel and aluminum, are harming the very manufacturing base they claim to defend.

To help navigate the White House's chaotic, ever-evolving trade measures, I am working on legislation to best support American workers and manufacturers while lowering costs for consumers across the country. This is critical.

Mr. Bolen, can you touch on how proposed or implemented tariffs are impacting your members' businesses?

Mr. BOLEN. Well, I think one way to look at it is to look at what has happened over the last 45 years when we had over 30 countries operating in basically a duty-free environment.

So, the 1980 Agreement on Trade in Civil Aircraft has been able to help the United States dominate virtually every aspect of aviation. We have $120 billion that comes in every year as a result of our exports. The flip of that is we spend about $20 billion. So it is over $100 billion to our economy when we are operating with free, fair, reciprocal trade.

And that is something that NBAA and, I think, a lot of others submitted for comment yesterday as the section 232 hearings or investigation is underway at the Commerce Department and certainly something that we have made clear. With that agreement, we have seen that fair, free, reciprocal trade allows the U.S. to dominate, as we have in every aspect of aviation for decades.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you.

My time has expired. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields.

I now recognize Mr. Bresnahan for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to underscore a major theme of today's hearing: safety. Aerospace safety is very personal to me. I am a licensed certificate holder for rotorcraft as well as a part 107 holder. And in the spirit of full transparency, I am a dues-paying member of your organization.

I represent northeastern Pennsylvania, which is approximately 120 miles away from Newark, where we have five airports within sight of our congressional district. We have Wyoming Valley, Cherry Ridge, Mount Pocono, Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport, as well as Hazleton, where I also had the privilege of visiting the TRACON over the weekend as well as the air traffic control tower and really got to see firsthand—it was the first time I was able to put a face to a voice of someone I speak to so frequently.

And I know safety matters to each of us here and to the pilots, the flight attendants, the mechanics, air traffic controllers, ground crews, passengers, and the families who we all represent. While I wasn't in Congress last year when the FAA reauthorization was passed, I am proud to work alongside my colleagues this Congress to advance aviation safety.

I am also very proud to have supported the $12.5 billion funding bump for ATC modernization in H.R. 1, as well as, alongside Congressman John Garamendi from California, we are leading a bipartisan letter asking the FAA to reject any proposal to allow single-pilot operations in commercial airline operations.

I guess my question really surrounds ADS–B, and perhaps maybe with Mr. Robbins and Mr. Pleasance.

I am a helicopter pilot. Oftentimes, I fly at relatively lower altitudes. And I had read in your testimony, Mr. Robbins, about the need for broadcasting on all various different types of aircrafts. And I know, obviously, in controlled airspace, we are more inclined and regulated to do so.

But, Mr. Pleasance, I would be really interested to get your perspective on ADS–B in all airspaces. Sometimes, northeastern Pennsylvania, predominantly a rural area, sure, we have in-and-out, but aircraft comes up relatively quickly, specifically in darker environments, sunset environments. And I actually agree with the concept that we should be more proactive in broadcasting positions, specifically with gliders and rotorcraft. And now with the evolution of unmanned aircraft, I think it is something that we can—at least me personally, I would be happy to support.

So, Mr. Pleasance, I would be interested to get your perspective from your organization and what you are hearing from your pilots.

Mr. PLEASANCE. Yes. Thank you for the question.

I think it is an important one, because we all have a vested interest in aerial vehicles not encountering each other in the sky. And I think ADS–B is a critical technology that enables that, enables that separation.

And you are right, it is not required in all airspace around the country. But, increasingly, a lot of the lower altitude airspace, whether it is helicopters, aerial ag planes basically, crop dusters, unmanned aircraft that perhaps are out in these more remote locations, we want those all to avoid each other.

So, I am personally and our organization is a proponent of ADS–B adoption, with two caveats.

One is, I think there is an opportunity to make it easier to adopt basic portable ADS–B units. They use these in Europe all the time in balloons and hang gliders and powered parachutes and so on. There is no electrical system required, but they serve the core purpose of emitting a signal that says "I'm here" and allows other aircraft to see them.

The second one is the privacy one I mentioned earlier. Anything we are doing in this country that dissuades people from using that technology, I think, is a step backwards. And so, we will continue to advocate for improving the motivation for as many pilots as possible to adopt that technology.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Being from Pennsylvania, I am really excited to see the outcome of today's State legislature hearings and what actually unfolds behind it.

And I also read in your testimony about the privacy concerns amongst pilots, and I have heard it, as well, too. And there is a very solid campaign right now going around at local FBOs about the infringement there.

But I was wondering if there were any more concrete examples that you could point to where a pilot or an aircraft owner received a citation relevant to the ADS–B information that was actually sent back to the FAA, and I would be really interested to see some of that.

Mr. PLEASANCE. Yes, absolutely. There is a very tangible one with a seaplane pilot up in Connecticut that was doing touch-and-go's on a river, and somebody called in and reported the aircraft for low flying. But it was, of course, taking off and landing, so that is what you do, is you go up and you come down, and you are typically not very high.

And so there was a claim made that this pilot was flying exceedingly low, and the only data that was in support of that was ADS–B data. And, as you know, ADS–B data is only so accurate, because it operates off of pressure altitude and has to be adjusted for barometric pressure, and so what you see get read by the system may or may not be exactly how high that aircraft is off the ground.

So that is a very tangible one where that pilot has currently lost their license and is fighting to get it back.

I also get emails almost every week, one just a week ago or so out in the Seattle area, where there is aircraft out there doing perfectly legal safety training, basically turns around a point, and they are getting—the FAA out there, the FSDO office, is getting emails from a neighbor who is just not happy with the fact they are doing that. And they are pulling up pictures of that airplane and the N-Number and the ownership of that airplane every time. And there is not one airplane, there are many that go to do the training there.

And so I think it is a further example of how—in this case, the FAA has not gone after the pilot. They are trying to educate the person on the ground. But it is creating a level of—a dynamic that is not helpful, let's just say, from both a safety as well as the fairness perspective.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. I appreciate that insight.

And I appreciate all the witnesses for being here today. And aeromedical reform will be a continued conversation since I am out of time.

And, with that, I yield back. Thanks.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Ms. Norton for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The tragic collision near DCA earlier this year and several recent near-misses at and near airports across the country demonstrate that swiftly implementing the safety and workforce provisions of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 must be a top priority.

However, there are actions the Department of Transportation and the FAA can take beyond these provisions to improve aviation safety.

For example, last month, I joined colleagues in sending a letter requesting report language in the Transportation appropriations bill directing DOT and the FAA to commission an independent review of airspace design, civil-military coordination, and operational safety in the national capital region.

Ms. Nelson, do you think such an independent review would help improve aviation safety in the national capital region?

Ms. NELSON. Yes, I do.

Ms. NORTON. I was deeply disappointed to hear at this committee's hearing last month on the FAA Reauthorization Act that the FAA continues to allow military and other Federal helicopters near DCA with their ADS–B transponders turned off.

Despite the Acting FAA Administrator's announcement at a Senate hearing in March that the FAA is now requiring ADS–B transponders be turned on for helicopter flights in DCA class B airspace, FAA Deputy Chief Operating Officer Franklin McIntosh told this committee that helicopter flights relating to law enforcement, national security, or the transport of Government officials are [sic] required to use ADS–B transponders near DCA.

Their refusal to implement this critical aviation safety change puts the lives of passengers, pilots, and flightcrews at risk.

Last month, I sent a letter to Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy urging DOT to require all helicopters operating near DCA to use ADS–B transponders and to prohibit the use of helicopters for transporting Government officials in the national capital region, except in the case of a national emergency or the transport of the President and the Vice President.

Captain Reven, your testimony highlighted the need to upgrade aviation infrastructure to utilize ADS–B transponders. Unfortunately, even when ADS–B transponders are present at a military or Federal helicopter flying in DCA airspace, there is a good chance they will be turned off because of the numerous exemptions the FAA continues to permit. Would requiring exemptions to turning off ADS–B transponders lower the risk of aviation accidents?

Mr. REVEN. Thank you for the question, Congresswoman. I appreciate that. And you are referring to the Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast that we have on our aircraft. And two different types, just to say. There is one that broadcasts out and one that receives.

So, as captains, as pilots, we want every piece of safety information we can possibly get, and the more of those that are turned on, the better that we can see traffic. There is no doubt to that.

But as far as those decisions, DOT and Department of Defense and FAA—it is a bit above our pay grade as far as national security goes. So understand that there have to be some balances from time to time.

But the simple answer to your question is, the more that the ADS–B is turned on, the safer it is.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you.

And I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields.

I now recognize Mr. Van Drew.

Dr. VAN DREW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I wanted to talk about drones. I am going to speak about drones in a minute.

I was concerned—my good friend from Georgia on the other side of the aisle—and he is a good guy, and I consider him a friend, and we have a lot of similar committees, so we debate a lot in Judiciary. We fancy and think that this is more of a nonpartisan committee.

But there seemed to be—and, respectfully, Ms. Nelson, even on your part—the sense that I had when I was in here a little while ago, that chaos has erupted because of the new President and the new administration.

And there may be some problems. There always are. And not everything that happened I agreed with. But let's understand, we are where we are for years of past activity. Let's call it what it is. And let's just think about the chaos.

The chaos is when we didn't install fiber when we needed fiber in our airports.

The chaos was when I went and visited air traffic controllers in towers and they were using floppy disks that you couldn't get through any of their normal means of acquisition; they had to go to discount stores to see if they could find them.

The chaos is when you have decaying copper.

The chaos is when you moved air traffic control from New York, Newark Airport—we moved it from New York to Philadelphia—Philadelphia, without the STARS system in place; Philadelphia, with decrepit, aging copper in place; Philadelphia, where they also, because of the reconstruction of the runway, had a lot of different issues and problems there as well.

And on top of it, what we have had has not just resulted in the last 6 months. We have had a shortage of air traffic controllers and, for that matter, pilots, for years. We have a problem.

These are the real problems and the real issues.

And, quite frankly—and, again, I am going to be candid; that is the way I am—we have been worried over the past years about which bathrooms to use, what pronouns to use, whether we can call the cockpit the cockpit anymore, I mean, all this stuff.

This is about infrastructure. It's about science. It's about staffing. It's about making sure that we do things the right way.

There isn't just chaos in the last 6 months. This has been going on, really substantive underlying problems that need to be ad-

dressed. And I particularly wanted to say that because I heard that conversation between Ms. Nelson and Congressman Johnson.

The United States is over a decade behind the rest of the world in drone technologies and infrastructure, and we need to catch up. On June 1, Ukraine launched 117 long-range, low-cost drones, and we saw the damage that they did. And the point of that is not that they shouldn't have done it, but how effective drones can be. And they say they only cost probably about $1,000 each to make.

There is not a lot in place that would stop our enemies from utilizing these techniques against us as well. We know that Iran has drones. Some folks made fun—there is something called a mothership. It is not from outer space. It is these large ships like aircraft carriers that carry these drones.

And we need a clear roadmap to protect our skies, to protect our critical infrastructure, to protect our America. And we have passed bipartisan laws to deal with this, but we have repeatedly missed crucial deadlines. Notably, section 2209, intended to safeguard fixed sites, was enacted in 2016. It is 9 years later; still no rule.

Mr. Robbins, thank you for being here today.

Thank you all for being here.

When do you think we can expect a rule for section 2209? And what is driving this delay so long?

Mr. ROBBINS. Yes. Thank you very much for that question, Congressman. And we appreciate the ongoing dialogue with you and your team on this issue.

It is our understanding that section 2209 is in a draft form and is currently at the White House under review. That rule is tied along with the beyond visual line of sight rule. So we are hopeful that we are going to see that draft rule released in the near future.

And we have also heard that it is possible that, through an Executive order, the Trump administration may direct the FAA to move section 2209 directly to an interim final rule so that it takes effect immediately. And then there is an opportunity to still perfect the rule, but it goes into effect right away.

Dr. VAN DREW. And I thank you for that. And the way I say things, we are probably doing more now, getting more done this year, than has happened since that was enacted years and years and years ago, where nothing happened. That's chaos. That's chaos.

Mr. ROBBINS. If I could add one other point, sir.

Dr. VAN DREW. Sure.

Mr. ROBBINS. This committee is the lead committee of jurisdiction on expanding UAS detection and mitigation authorities. It has been since 2018 that Congress updated the UAS detection and mitigation authorities.

Dr. VAN DREW. Unbelievable. Unbelievable. That's chaos.

Mr. ROBBINS. It is far past time for those authorities to be updated and to give our Federal authorities, as well as State, local, Tribal, Territorial, the ability to train properly and integrate, at the very least, detection technologies and, in very-bad-day situations, nonkinetic mitigation technologies in the homeland.

Dr. VAN DREW. We are out of time, but I just want to say, record amounts of money are going to be coming into our airports and into our FAA.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields.

I now recognize Ms. Titus for 5 minutes.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. When you get to me, everything has pretty much been asked, but I appreciate that.

I am glad there was a lot of emphasis on workforce development. I worked with Mr. Molinaro in the bill to get that put in there, funding for it and support for it. So I know how much it is needed, and I am glad that is moving forward across the whole industry.

As we look at safety and air traffic controllers, though, and improving that system, I want us to be sure we don't forget about the contract towers, because some of those, I think, are behind in who they are contracting with or how few they have. And I want to put that on our list to consider, too.

I thank Mr. Van Drew for asking about the drones. Another part of that, in terms of bringing us up to date, was a rule I got in the FAA that calls for us to look at beyond line of sight. That deadline, too, was missed. That was last September. But I am hoping that we will see it come this summer.

Can somebody—Mr. Robbins, can you address where we are with that and talk about why line of sight is so important? We see it in Nevada in rescue operations being needed or fixing power lines out in the desert where trucks can't go. So could you address where we are with that?

Mr. ROBBINS. Yes, absolutely, ma'am. Thank you so much. And thank you for your leadership of the UAS Caucus here in the House of Representatives.

So, along with the section 2209 rule that I just discussed with Congressman Van Drew, the beyond visual line of sight rule is now at the White House for review as part of the OIRA and interagency process.

So we are hopeful to see the draft rule published soon. As you noted, that draft rule is now 261 days overdue from the statutory deadline set in the FAA reauthorization, and that puts the final rule deadline at jeopardy as well.

So, in the meantime, it is creating a situation where public safety officials, agricultural operators, drone delivery, medical, others, have to go through a very time-intensive, labor-intensive, and very expensive process on a case-by-case waiver of rule.

Now, the FAA has done a good job of speeding up the waiver approval process, particularly for things they have seen before and can improve much quicker. So we give the FAA credit for that. But this is not a scalable model. Industry needs a rule to adhere to that they can then go out and operate to. And we stand ready to work with the FAA to implement this as quickly as possible.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I hope to see that because there are so many good uses, not just the military ones Mr. Van Drew talked about.

Mr. ROBBINS. Right. Thank you, ma'am.

Ms. TITUS. My other question I will go back to, privatizing air traffic controllers. Mr. Bolen, you mentioned it, but I wanted to ask Ms. Nelson how her folks feel about privatizing and why and why not.

Ms. NELSON. Absolutely not, we shouldn't have for-profit in a safety system, no.

Ms. TITUS. Just that simple?

Ms. NELSON. It is that simple. We are fully opposed to it, but so is the entire industry. There was a letter earlier this year signed by everyone in the industry. We are all on the same page. There is a roadmap in the 2024 FAA reauthorization bill for us to move forward without privatization. I think everyone is on the same page. We don't need any distractions from getting this done.

And I would just add that the breakdown of the air traffic control system is not just an economic issue and just a jobs issue and just a safety issue. What this also has is ancillary problems of more disruptive passengers because they are angry, they are stuck in the airports, they are stuck on the planes for longer. Flight attendants are facing that much more often, and flight attendants are also facing fatigue because our days are getting longer as these delays are going on.

So, there are a lot of problems, but the path forward is not privatization. It is moving forward with the bill that you passed last year and the plans that Secretary Duffy has put forward, too.

Ms. TITUS. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields.

Any further questions?

No, I don't see any.

Seeing none, this concludes our hearing for today.

I would like to thank each one of you. I think this is good stuff. We need to do this more often, right?

This committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:08 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Statement of Hon. Sam Graves, a Representative in Congress from the State of Missouri, and Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Thank you, Chairman Nehls, and thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Last month, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing to mark the one-year anniversary of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 being signed into law.

During the hearing, we heard from the FAA on the progress they've made in implementing the largest and most comprehensive FAA Reauthorization in history.

As a professional pilot and active user of the aviation system, this legislation was particularly important to me.

I am very proud of the bipartisan work this Committee did to pass a major piece of legislation that will benefit every American who uses the aviation system.

And while the FAA has made progress, there is still a long road ahead.

Conducting rigorous oversight of the FAA Reauthorization Act is imperative if we are to ensure that the FAA follows the letter of the law and is held accountable for meeting deadlines.

Today, we have the opportunity to hear from stakeholders in the aviation community on provisions that are essential to the success of their sectors and listen to their perspectives on implementation of the law so far.

I am grateful for their insight and remain hopeful that, together, we can ensure this consequential law gets implemented on time and as Congress intended.

The proper implementation of the law is critical, as we work in concert with the Trump Administration to modernize the air traffic control system and provide the necessary boost in staffing at our ATC facilities.

Thank you, Chairman Nehls. I yield back.

Statement of Cade Clark, Chief Government Affairs Officer, Vertical Aviation International, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Troy E. Nehls

Chairman Nehls and Ranking Member Cohen, thank you for the opportunity to provide the vertical aviation industry's perspective on the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024.

VAI is the trade association for the civil vertical aviation industry, representing more than 1,000 aviation businesses and 15,000 aviation professionals in 75 nations. VAI is dedicated to fueling the growth of the vertical aviation industry through connection, education, advocacy, and safety so that communities around the world are strengthened by the power of vertical flight. VAI is unique among aviation associations in that our members reflect all sectors of the vertical aviation industry, including operators of unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), next generation vertical-takeoff-and-landing (VTOL) aircraft (often called AAM aircraft), and helicopters, as well as the full range of companies that support and supply the industry, including manufacturers and education and training, maintenance, and other service providers.

First, I want to express our appreciation to this Subcommittee for your continued recognition of the critical role vertical flight plays in our national transportation and emergency response systems. The 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act contains meaningful reforms that support the operational needs of today's rotorcraft and powered-lift aircraft while laying the groundwork for safe, scalable integration of next-generation vertical flight technologies. The Act gives us a solid roadmap—we now need to ensure it gets implemented on time and in full.

Proper execution of statutory provisions is essential to realizing the full potential of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act. Section 627, in particular, is a pivotal man-

date to enhance the safety, predictability, and functionality of low-altitude IFR operations for rotorcraft and powered-lift aircraft. We urge the FAA to act with urgency and clarity—and we ask that Congress maintain rigorous oversight to ensure the agency follows both the letter and the intent of the law.

Additionally, we encourage the FAA to engage closely with subject matter experts, like VAI, as it carries out the implementation of FAA Reauthorization. Leveraging the expertise and on-the-ground experience of industry partners will be key in ensuring successful and timely outcomes.

In this testimony, I will address the importance of Section 627 and the broader challenges and opportunities facing the vertical aviation industry today.

SECTION 627 IMPLEMENTATION

Section 627 of the FAA Reauthorization Act directs the FAA to initiate a rulemaking process within three years to establish or update low-altitude IFR routes and procedures for rotorcraft and powered-lift aircraft using performance-based navigation. This mandate arrives at a critical juncture. The recent tragic midair collision over Washington, D.C. is a solemn reminder of the criticality of ensuring safety in the national airspace at all flight levels, including low level flight. The FAA must act decisively to ensure its ongoing efforts to improve low-altitude safety are meaningfully integrated with the implementation of Section 627.

To fulfill the intent of Section 627, the FAA must initiate internal planning and pre-rulemaking activities without delay and clearly communicate its timeline for stakeholder engagement and formal rulemaking. We urge the agency to prioritize the most congested and operationally complex airspace for early implementation efforts.

As part of this mandate, the FAA must modernize the Helicopter Route Chart Program by revising outdated routes and improving publication practices to reflect performance-based navigation capabilities.

This work must also be fully integrated with the Department of Transportation's broader air traffic control modernization initiatives, particularly those focused on enabling digital separation and optimizing low-altitude corridors. VAI backs the Administration's Air Traffic Control Modernization Plan and is a member of the Modern Skies Coalition which strongly supports the Plan. While the Plan appropriately focuses on investment in people, equipment, and facilities, low-altitude flights must be incorporated in the operations considered for modernization initiatives.

Finally, the FAA must assess whether it has the technical expertise, budgetary support, and staffing levels necessary to carry out Section 627 on schedule. If gaps exist, the agency should identify and communicate the specific resources required to accelerate progress—especially in high-density, mixed-use airspace environments.

ESSENTIAL SERVICE TO THE AMERICAN PUBLIC

Vertical lift aircraft play an irreplaceable role in serving the American public across a wide range of missions. Critical missions include search and rescue, medical evacuations, firefighting, law enforcement, post-disaster access and evacuations, critical infrastructure inspection and repair, homeland security, news and traffic monitoring, construction and heavy lifting, and forest management.

Americans saw first-hand the criticality of helicopter response during last year's Hurricane Helene which devastated parts of North Carolina—many areas were completely inaccessible by road. Over 506 helicopters were deployed by the National Guard and approximately 1007 helicopters were contributed by private volunteers and organizations. These helicopters were critical in conducting search and rescue missions, delivering medical supplies, and reaching areas that were otherwise completely decimated.

A similar call to service was seen with the catastrophic Palisades and Eaton fires in the Los Angeles, California area last year. At the peak of operations, 60 helicopters were deployed to fight these fires—all vital in mitigating the impact of these fires and saving countless lives, homes, and businesses.

In 2024 alone, the U.S. government contracted 986 helicopters for wildfire response, including both large-capacity aircraft (Type 1) capable of delivering substantial water or retardant payloads and large crew transport and medium/light helicopters (Type 2) utilized for small crew transport, reconnaissance and tactical water drops.

Vertical aviation continues to grow in aircraft and services provided. Clearly defined, up-to-date, and technologically advanced routing infrastructure provides increased efficiency and safety to vertical lift allowing the industry to better respond to the next wildfire, hurricane, or large-scale emergency.

CONTINUAL ADVANCEMENT

Emerging technology, notably Vertical Takeoff and Landing (VTOL), Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), and aircraft with advanced propulsion systems, autonomous capabilities, or fly-by-wire systems, are positioned to greatly influence the global aviation industry over the next decade. Conservative projections value this segment at over $20.8 billion by 2035, signaling a significant expansion of the vertical flight ecosystem.

The performance, capabilities, and flight profiles of AAM can take advantage of and benefit from a low-altitude airspace structure that is flexible, data-driven, and aligned with performance-based navigation standards. Section 627 mandates the FAA to establish or update IFR routes and procedures for rotorcraft and powered-lift aircraft—including many AAM and eVTOL platforms—ensuring that tomorrow's aircraft have a safe, predictable, and scalable path to integration in the National Airspace System.

Section 627 is not just about today's helicopters—it is about building an airspace environment capable of supporting the next generation of vertical flight. If implemented with urgency and precision, it will help unlock the full potential of emerging aircraft, secure U.S. leadership in advanced air mobility, and support a vibrant, high-tech manufacturing sector that benefits communities nationwide.

CONCLUSION

The vertical lift industry is and will remain a cornerstone of America's economy, public safety infrastructure, and emergency response capability. From saving lives during natural disasters to supporting daily operations in law enforcement, infrastructure, and logistics, the industry enhances the quality of life across the country. As the sector evolves with new technologies and growing mission demands, the systems that support it—especially low-altitude airspace infrastructure—must evolve as well.

Section 627 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 is a critical step toward that evolution. Its successful implementation will help ensure that rotorcraft and powered-lift aircraft can operate safely, predictably, and efficiently in increasingly congested and complex environments. It also lays the foundation for integrating advanced technologies and aircraft into a more modern, performance-based airspace system.

VAI appreciates the opportunity to provide input as part of this hearing and stands ready to be a constructive partner in ensuring the success of Section 627. We welcome continued collaboration with Congress, the FAA, and industry stakeholders to implement this Act in a way that supports national security, public safety, and the future of vertical flight in the United States.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS TO EDWARD M. BOLEN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, NATIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION ASSOCIATION, FROM HON. JULIA BROWNLEY

Question 1. Can you discuss how important it is for the FAA to work with industry to quickly identify, review, and approve a safe lead-free aviation gasoline that can be adopted fleetwide across the country?

ANSWER. The transition to unleaded aviation gasoline is a matter of both environmental responsibility and operational urgency. NBAA strongly supports the FAA's continued collaboration with industry through initiatives like the Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions (EAGLE) program. Achieving a universally adoptable, safe unleaded avgas is critical. A coordinated and expedited approach to testing, approval, and deployment is essential to avoid disruptions in general aviation operations and to ensure that operators, especially those at smaller or rural airports, can continue to access the fuel they need to operate safely and reliably.

Question 1.a. From a safety perspective, how critical is it that any unleaded fuel work seamlessly across the entire general aviation fleet without requiring different fuel handling procedures or performance considerations for different aircraft types?

ANSWER. From a safety standpoint, fleetwide compatibility is paramount. General aviation relies on a diverse mix of aircraft, often operating in remote environments and supported by small businesses and airports and fixed-base operators with limited infrastructure. A universal drop-in fuel would rely on the existing infrastructure, without requiring additional investment that most general aviation airports cannot afford and ensures consistency in engine performance, avoids misfueling risks, and eliminates the need for specialized training, signage, or fueling procedures that could introduce human error. Anything short of a seamless transition poses real safety concerns for pilots, maintenance technicians, and fueling personnel.

Additionally, until a universal drop-in unleaded fuel has been identified, it is critical that the existing 100LL Aviation Gasoline supply and availability remain in place at all airports. Aircraft utilizing 100LL gasoline today reflect a broad diversity of disaster relief, aero medical, small community air transport, recreational, and other missions.

Question 1.b. Many business aviation operators manage diverse fleets of aircraft. What operational and financial burdens would be created if these operators had to manage multiple fuel types, different performance characteristics, and varying availability across their route networks?

ANSWER. The introduction of multiple fuel types would impose significant logistical and financial burdens on business aviation operators. Managing a fleet with different fueling requirements would complicate dispatch planning, increase the risk of fuel mismatches, and potentially ground aircraft if the correct fuel type is unavailable at a destination. Operators would incur added costs for training personnel, retrofitting equipment, updating fuel storage infrastructure, and developing new operational protocols—all of which divert resources from safety and efficiency initiatives. Lack of appropriate fuel at the operator's home base airport would require additional flights to obtain fuel, adding additional risk. A patchwork of fuel availability across the country would further compound these challenges, especially for operators who depend on operational flexibility to meet time-sensitive missions.

NBAA urges the FAA to continue prioritizing a fleetwide solution that ensures safety, reliability, and accessibility for all general aviation stakeholders.

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