FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2024: AN UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION ONE YEAR LATER

(119–21)

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

MAY 15, 2025

Printed for the use of the
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Available online at: https://www.govinfo.gov/committee/house-transportation?path=/browsecommittee/chamber/house/committee/transportation

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

61–684 PDF WASHINGTON : 2025

COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

SAM GRAVES, Missouri, *Chairman*
RICK LARSEN, Washington, *Ranking Member*

ERIC A. "RICK" CRAWFORD, Arkansas, *Vice Chairman*
DANIEL WEBSTER, Florida
THOMAS MASSIE, Kentucky
SCOTT PERRY, Pennsylvania
BRIAN BABIN, Texas
DAVID ROUZER, North Carolina
MIKE BOST, Illinois
DOUG LAMALFA, California
BRUCE WESTERMAN, Arkansas
BRIAN J. MAST, Florida
PETE STAUBER, Minnesota
TIM BURCHETT, Tennessee
DUSTY JOHNSON, South Dakota
JEFFERSON VAN DREW, New Jersey
TROY E. NEHLS, Texas
TRACEY MANN, Kansas
BURGESS OWENS, Utah
ERIC BURLISON, Missouri
MIKE COLLINS, Georgia
MIKE EZELL, Mississippi
KEVIN KILEY, California
VINCE FONG, California
TONY WIED, Wisconsin
TOM BARRETT, Michigan
NICHOLAS J. BEGICH III, Alaska
ROBERT P. BRESNAHAN, JR., Pennsylvania
JEFF HURD, Colorado
JEFFERSON SHREVE, Indiana
ADDISON P. MCDOWELL, North Carolina
DAVID J. TAYLOR, Ohio
BRAD KNOTT, North Carolina
KIMBERLYN KING-HINDS, Northern Mariana Islands
MIKE KENNEDY, Utah
ROBERT F. ONDER, JR., Missouri
JIMMY PATRONIS, Florida

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON, District of Columbia
JERROLD NADLER, New York
STEVE COHEN, Tennessee
JOHN GARAMENDI, California
HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR., Georgia
ANDRÉ CARSON, Indiana
DINA TITUS, Nevada
JARED HUFFMAN, California
JULIA BROWNLEY, California
FREDERICA S. WILSON, Florida
MARK DESAULNIER, California
SALUD O. CARBAJAL, California
GREG STANTON, Arizona
SHARICE DAVIDS, Kansas
JESÚS G. "CHUY" GARCÍA, Illinois
CHRIS PAPPAS, New Hampshire
SETH MOULTON, Massachusetts
MARILYN STRICKLAND, Washington
PATRICK RYAN, New York
VAL T. HOYLE, Oregon
EMILIA STRONG SYKES, Ohio, *Vice Ranking Member*
HILLARY J. SCHOLTEN, Michigan
VALERIE P. FOUSHEE, North Carolina
CHRISTOPHER R. DELUZIO, Pennsylvania
ROBERT GARCIA, California
NELLIE POU, New Jersey
KRISTEN MCDONALD RIVET, Michigan
LAURA FRIEDMAN, California
LAURA GILLEN, New York
SHOMARI FIGURES, Alabama

CONTENTS

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Sam Graves
Chairman

Jack Ruddy, Staff Director

Rick Larsen
Ranking Member

Katherine W. Dedrick, Democratic Staff Director

MAY 9, 2025

SUMMARY OF SUBJECT MATTER

TO: Members, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
FROM: Staff, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
RE: Full Committee Hearing on "*FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024: An Update on Implementation One Year Later*"

I. PURPOSE

The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will meet on May 15, 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: An Update on Implementation One Year Later*." As the one-year anniversary of the enactment of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (FAARA 2024) approaches, this hearing will provide an update from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA or the "Agency") and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on the status of various provisions of the law. Members will have the opportunity to question the FAA on the implementation of FAARA 2024, highlight their priorities in the law, and hear the FAA and GAO's plans for implementing any remaining provisions.

II. BACKGROUND

On May 16, 2024, President Biden signed into law H.R. 3935, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118–63).[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://www.whitehouse.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 approach 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 reflects key programs included in the relevant titles 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]

---

[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 Moseh 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] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 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] 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 January 2025, ARV is operational at 77 airports.[16] More recently in March 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.[17]

Additionally, as part of Congress' budget reconciliation effort, the 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.[18]

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.[19] 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.[20]

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.[21] 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.[22]

Don Young Alaska Aviation Safety Initiative

Aviation is essential in Alaska, as 82 percent of the state's communities are inaccessible by road.[23] 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 (DYAASI).[24] The objective of 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

---

[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] *Id.*

[17] *Id.*

[18] 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].

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

[20] *Id.*

[21] 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.).

[22] Hill Update *supra* note 14.

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

[24] 49 U.S.C. § 44745.

state of weather cameras, and implement certain NTSB recommendations.[25] To date, FAA has not provided an update on implementation of DYASSI.

GROWING THE AVIATION WORKFORCE

FAARA 2024 incorporated 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.[26] 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." [27]

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.[28] Additionally, this section directs the Transportation Research Board (TRB) to identify the most appropriate staffing model for future air traffic controller workforce needs 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.[29] The FAA is continuing to work to meet the mandates set forth in FAARA 2024.[30]

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, expediting the hiring timeline by approximately four months.[31]

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.[32] These reforms have garnered bipartisan support and work to fulfill the Congressional intent of section 437 of FAARA

---

[25] *Id.*

[26] *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).

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

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

[29] Hill Update *supra* note 14

[30] *Id.*

[31] 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.

[32] *Id.*

2024.[33] 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).[34]

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.[35] 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.[36] 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.[37] 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.[38] 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 Americans to pursue good-paying careers in aviation.[39] 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.[40] 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.[41] 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.[42] In January 2025, the FAA released the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the aviation maintenance and aircraft pilot grant programs;[43] however, the aviation manufacturing grant program has not yet been established.[44]

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.[45] 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

---

[33] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 411, 138 Stat. 1176.

[34] 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.

[35] 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.

[36] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 437, 138 Stat. 1156.

[37] Hill Update *supra* note 14.

[38] *Id.*

[39] Pub. L. No. 115–254 § 625, 132 Stat. 3405.

[40] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 440, 138 Stat. 1179.

[41] *Id.*

[42] *Id.*

[43] FAA, *Aviation Workforce Development Grants*, (March 3, 2025), *available at*: https://www.faa.gov/about/office__org/headquarters__offices/ang/grants/awd.

[44] 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.)

[45] *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).

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.[46] 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.[47] To date, FAA has not provided an update on implementation on these provisions.

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.[48] 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.[49] 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."[50] 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.[51] However, NextGen programs have been vulnerable to delays and cost-overruns.[52] According to a September 2024 GAO report, NextGen activities' initial completion dates of 2025 have been delayed to 2030.[53] 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.[54]

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.[55] 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.[56] The FAA expects to meet the statutory deadline under this section.[57]

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.[58] This requirement includes deadlines for each program and the FAA must notify Congress

---

[46] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 429, § 430, § 431, 138 Stat. 1171, 1172, 1173.
[47] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 428, 138 Stat. 1170.
[48] 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
[49] FAA, *Air Traffic by the Numbers* (Sept. 9, 2024), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/air__traffic/by__the__numbers.
[50] FAA, *Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen)* (last updated Jan. 14, 2025), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/nextgen.
[51] *Id.*
[52] 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).
[53] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–24–107001, AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL: FAA ACTIONS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED TO MODERNIZE AGING SYSTEMS (Sept. 2024).
[54] U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO–17–450, AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL MODERNIZATION: PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING NEXTGEN (2017).
[55] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 206, 138 Stat. 1044.
[56] *Id.*
[57] Briefing from FAA to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff, *2024 FAA Reauthorization Hill Update* (Oct. 8, 2024) (Slides on file with Comm)
[58] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 619, 138 Stat. 1231.

regarding any failure to meet them.[59] 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.[60] 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.[61] It also directs the FAA to develop a list of unfunded facility and equipment needs that were not included in the President's budget.[62]

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. In total, the FAA estimates there are approximately 14,400 private and 5,000 public-use airports, heliports, and seaplane bases in the United States.[63] FAARA 2024 contained a robust airport title that prioritized 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.[64]

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 increased 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 reduced 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.[65] 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 of the Act.[66] While the FAA has issued three letters so far, they do not comprehensively explain the implementation of all AIP-related provisions in FAARA 2024.[67]

Environmental Programs and Streamlining

FAARA 2024 contained 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 streamlined and expanded the Voluntary Airport Low Emission (VALE) program to airports in non-attainment areas.[68] Section 783 significantly revised existing streamlining environmental procedures for certain important categories of airport projects, while section 788 established a new categorical exclusion for airport projects receiving less than $6 million in Federal funding.[69] While the FAA has promulgated field guidance for

---

[59] *Id.*
[60] *Id.*
[61] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 622, 138 Stat. 1237.
[62] *Id.* at § 213.
[63] FAA, *Airport Categories* (last updated Dec. 7, 2022), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/airports/planning__capacity/categories.
[64] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10, 138 Stat. 1245.
[65] *Id.*
[66] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 733, 138 Stat. 1273.
[67] Email from Federal Aviation Administration, to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff (Apr. 7, 2025, 1:50 EST) (on file with Comm.); Email from Federal Aviation Administration, to Subcomm. on Aviation Staff (Apr. 29, 2025, 8:41 EST) (on file with Comm.).
[68] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 782, 138 Stat. 1302
[69] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 783, 138 Stat. 1302; FAARA 2024, *supra* note 9 at § 788, 138 Stat. 1314.

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.[70]

Sections 786 and 792 of FAARA 2024 directed 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.[71] The FAA has not completed the process of updating its noise standards. A charter for the advisory committee was issued on January 14, 2025.[72] 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.[73] Given GA's importance to the aviation ecosystem, FAARA 2024 included 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.[74] 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.[75] 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.[76] The FAA issued a final rule updating parts 61 and 68, of Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations, on November 15, 2024, updating BasicMed regulations to reflect the changes made by sections 828 and 815.[77] Additionally, the Agency remains on track to brief Congress on changes to small aircraft activity and safety incidents by the 2028 due date.[78]

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.[79] 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.

---

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

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

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

[73] 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/.

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

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

[76] FAARA 2024, *supra* note 10 at § 815, 138 Stat. 1328.

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

[78] Hill Update *supra* note 14.

[79] Janice Wood, *How much did you pay for your check ride?*, GENERAL AVIATION NEWS, (Oct. 19, 2022), *available at* https://generalaviationnews.com/2022/10/31/how-much-did-you-pay-for-your-check-ride/.

Part 135 Air Carrier Certificate Backlog

Following the Coronavirus pandemic, the FAA faced a significant backlog of several services, including certification of new applicants.[80] The backlog resulted in the potential for applicants having to wait two or even three years for FAA to initiate a certification process.[81] Section 818 requires the FAA to reduce the backlog of air carrier certificate applications under Part 135 of Title 14, Code of Federal Regulations.[82] 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.[83] As of April 15, 2025, the average acceptance and rejection timeframe for all part 135 applications is 31 days.[84]

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.[85] Title IX of FAARA 2024 incorporates provisions to foster the safe, efficient, and timely integration of new entrant technologies into the NAS. Like many other innovations of flight, 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. Provisions in FAARA 2024 ensure 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.[86] 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.[87] 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 approval, however, it was not cleared before the change in Administration. In February, the proposed BVLOS rule was resubmitted for Executive-level review under the new Administration and the Agency expects the proposed rule to be published this summer.[88] FAA is planning for the issuance of the final BVLOS rule in March 2027.[89]

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

---

[80] 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.

[81] *Id.*

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

[83] *Id.*

[84] 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.).

[85] 49 U.S.C. § 106(f)(3).

[86] FAA, UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS BEYOND VISUAL LINE OF SIGHT AVIATION RULEMAKING COMM., FINAL REPORT. 8, (Mar. 10, 2022), *available at* https://www.faa.gov/regulations__policies/rulemaking/committees/documents/media/UAS__BVLOS__ARC__FINAL__REPORT__03102022.pdf.

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

[88] 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.).

[89] *Id.*

more easily allow for safe commercial operations of UAS.[90] 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.[91]

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 into service in the coming years. AAM aircraft operators have long expected to use existing operating procedures for traditional aircraft, however, 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, the FAA, in early 2023, declared that it would publish a final Special Federal Aviation Regulation (SFAR) for AAM aircraft by "the fourth quarter of 2024." [92] Section 955 of the FAARA 2024 required the FAA to publish a final Powered-Lift SFAR no later than November 16, 2024, and the FAA accomplished the task a month early, announcing the final SFAR on October 22, 2024.[93]

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.[94] Section 745 establishes a five-year pilot program allowing up to 10 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.

IV. WITNESSES

- Jodi Baker, Deputy Associate Administrator, Aviation Safety, Federal Aviation Administration
- Wayne Heibeck, Deputy Associate Administrator, Airports, Federal Aviation Administration
- Franklin McIntosh, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Air Traffic Organization, Federal Aviation Administration
- Derrick Collins, Director, Physical Infrastructure, United States Government Accountability Office

---

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

[91] 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.).

[92] 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).

[93] 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.

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

Addendum to SSM for Full Committee Hearing on "FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024: An Update 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.
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. 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.

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

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
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 is working on the timeline and action plan for system and technology improvements.
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.
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.

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

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
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 ..	FAA continues to develop the required implementation plan.
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.
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.

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

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
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. 761 ...	Study on Air Cargo Operations in Puerto Rico.	In Progress ..	GAO remains on track to meet the deadline.
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.

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

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
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.
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.

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

Section #	Section Title	Progress	Notes
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 the 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: AN UPDATE ON IMPLEMENTATION ONE YEAR LATER

THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE,
WASHINGTON, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 10:07 a.m. in Room 2167, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Sam Graves (Chairman of the committee) presiding.

Mr. GRAVES. The Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure will come to order.

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

Without objection, that is so ordered.

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

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

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. SAM GRAVES OF MISSOURI, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. GRAVES. Tomorrow marks the 1-year anniversary of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 being signed into law. In crafting the law, the committee received and processed more than 2,100 stakeholder and Member requests. We held five detailed policy hearings in the leadup to introduction and produced a bipartisan product that garnered the support of more than 1,000 aviation organizations and companies. When all was said and done, the final bill passed with the support of 387 Members of the Congress and 88 Senators. Not many pieces of legislation enjoy that kind of bipartisan support.

And that bill, now law, touched just about everything in the aviation industry, including a strong and robust aviation safety title that included reforms to address close calls and near-misses; a workforce title that addressed the challenges head-on by removing barriers for veterans and young individuals looking to begin a career in civil aviation, including bolstering the air traffic control workforce; an airport infrastructure title that increased the Airport Improvement Program for the first time in over a decade and streamlined the environmental permitting process; a new entrant title crafted to maintain American leadership in this emerging sector; and a passenger experience title that was aimed at improving travel for all Americans.

Furthermore, it is a personal point of pride for me that the law included the very first ever GA title. General aviation is the foundation of our Nation's aviation system. In fact, it is where many of our pilots and our mechanics and other hard-working aviation professionals—it's where they began their career. Put simply, the law recognized the importance of general aviation and protected the freedom to fly for every single American.

While the committee has been conducting oversight to ensure that the congressional intent is upheld, today's hearing represents the first time that Members will be able to hear from the Federal Aviation Administration and the Government Accountability Office on their progress, and I am pleased the FAA has worked expeditiously to implement several key provisions in the GA title.

Additionally, with heightened attention being placed on the need to modernize our air traffic control system—an initiative that all in this room support—the reauthorization bill gave FAA a flight plan. Now they have to start the plan and actually follow it.

To aid that effort Republicans on this committee came together and approved a reconciliation package that appropriates $12.5 billion to the FAA for ATC modernization. This $12.5 billion investment is going to provide a significant downpayment on the administration's plan to overhaul and modernize the ATC system, and I look forward to working with them on this effort.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses for being here today, and I look forward to hearing from each of you on the progress that the FAA and the GAO have made in implementing this milestone legislation.

[Mr. Graves' prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Hon. Sam Graves of Missouri, Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Tomorrow marks the one-year anniversary of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 being signed into law.

In crafting the law, the Committee received and processed more than 2,100 stakeholder and Member requests, held five detailed policy hearings in the lead-up to introduction, and produced a bipartisan product that garnered the support of more than 1,000 aviation organizations and companies.

When all was said and done, the final bill passed with the support of 387 Members of Congress and 88 Senators. Not many pieces of legislation enjoy such wide bipartisan support.

That bill, now law, touched just about everything in the aviation industry, including a strong and robust aviation safety title that included reforms to address close calls and near-misses; a workforce title that addresses challenges head on by removing barriers for veterans and young individuals looking to begin a career in civil aviation, including bolstering the air traffic control workforce; an airport infrastructure title that increased the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) for the first time in over a decade and streamlined environmental permitting approvals; a new entrant title crafted to maintain American leadership in this emerging sector; and a passenger experience title aimed at improving travel for all Americans.

Furthermore, it's a personal point of pride for me that the law included the first-ever general aviation (GA) title. General aviation is the foundation of this nation's aviation system. In fact, it's where many of our pilots, mechanics, and other hard working aviation professionals begin their careers. Put simply, the law recognized the importance of general aviation and protected the freedom to fly for every American.

While the Committee has been conducting oversight to ensure that congressional intent is upheld, today's hearing represents the first time that Members will be able

to hear from the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on their progress.

I'm pleased the FAA has worked expeditiously to implement several key provisions in the GA title. Additionally, with heightened attention being placed on the need to modernize our air traffic control system—an initiative that all in this room support—the reauthorization bill gave the FAA a flight plan. Now they must start the plane and follow it.

To aid that effort, Republicans on this committee came together and approved a reconciliation package that appropriates $12.5 billion to the FAA for ATC modernization. This $12.5 billion investment will provide a significant down payment on the Administration's plan to overhaul and modernize the ATC system, and I look forward to working with them in that effort.

I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here today and look forward to hearing from each of you about the progress that the FAA and the GAO have made in implementing this milestone legislation.

Mr. GRAVES. With that, I recognize Ranking Member Larsen for his opening statement.

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

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Chair Graves, for calling today's oversight hearing on the implementation of the landmark 2024 FAA reauthorization law.

One year ago today, Congress took decisive action to improve aviation safety, foster aerospace innovation, grow the aviation workforce, and better protect the flying public. While the FAA is making progress in implementing the law, recent tragic aviation accidents and close calls make clear the administration must prioritize the critical safety reforms included in the reauthorization.

The immense loss that occurred from the tragic mid-air collision at Washington National Airport, DCA, highlights the need for the FAA and Congress to recommit to enhancing the safety of the National Airspace System and restoring the flying public's confidence in that system. Unfortunately, recent events have shown the problems we are seeing in the aviation industry extend much further than the issues that led to the heartbreaking plane crash on January 29th.

Shortly after this crash, there were several other fatal commercial crashes or safety accidents like in Alaska, Philadelphia, Arizona, and other places around the country. In the last 6 weeks alone, there have been an ongoing series of high-profile, troubling accidents, including: a helicopter conducting commercial air tours crashing in the Hudson River; two loss of separation events at DCA between a Black Hawk helicopter and a commercial airline flight; the wingtip of a Bombardier CRJ 900 striking an Embraer E175 on the taxiway at DCA; the FAA's NOTAM system, which provides essential real-time updates on conditions affecting flight safety, experiencing sudden outages; and at least three separate instances of ATC equipment failures affecting Newark Airport alone, resulting in hundreds of delays and cancellations.

The American people are justifiably outraged and demand the FAA do more to make our system safer and more reliable, and we want to help. It has also been true the U.S. strives to be the gold standard in aviation safety, but that statement can ring hollow to

some when there are almost daily reports of serious close calls or system failures.

And one of the most immediate and effective long-term solutions the FAA can do right now to make our system safer is to swiftly implement the 2024 law. That law, passed by this Congress in a bipartisan manner, as the chair has noted, provides the FAA with a 5-year roadmap on how the administration can address many of the safety issues we have recently seen. We gave you the "what needs to be done" list, and now we are in the "how-to" stage, and that is up to the FAA to implement.

For instance, earlier this week, it was reported that flight delays out of Newark Airport were in part due to only three controllers being on duty at the time, even though the staffing target was 14. Although the FAA is working to hire the maximum number of controllers from the agency's ATC training academy, as required by the law, the agency has yet to modernize staffing models for controllers and other aviation safety roles to meet the evolving needs of the NAS.

There have also been several recent near-misses and runway incursions at airports across the country, including DCA, Seattle, Chicago, and Boston. The reauthorization law requires the FAA to establish the Runway Safety Council, which would develop new strategies to address airport surface safety risks, identify and deploy airport surface surveillance technologies to all large- and medium-hub airports, and conduct a review of existing systems to assess how legacy technologies can be improved.

And the law could help prevent future ATC disruptions—such as the recent NOTAM outage and numerous ATC system failures that recently impacted Newark Airport—through its requirement that FAA audit its legacy ATC systems and make immediate improvements to any system deemed outdated or unsafe.

There are policies the FAA should be considering that were not included in the law, as well. For instance, just last week, the Secretary announced a proposal that will help fund the modernization of new ATC facilities, systems, and equipment. We have yet to receive a proposed budget for this proposal, and such an important and costly plan will require vigorous oversight. But I do encourage the committee members to take a look at what the Secretary is proposing, because I do believe it is a very positive step forward, and I look forward to working with the chair to develop bipartisan legislation that will help modernize the system.

Unfortunately, the administration's actions to shrink the Federal workforce will undermine the FAA's ability to implement the reauthorization law and could jeopardize aviation safety. For instance, over the last several months, the administration has fired several hundred FAA probationary employees; signed buyouts with over 4,000 DOT employees, nearly half of which are from the FAA; and threatened FAA and other employees with unproductive email requests. And earlier this month, the administration announced it will conduct additional layoffs at DOT. These layoffs could prevent not just the implementation of critical safety reforms included in the FAA law, but also prevent DOT from fixing the various challenges currently plaguing our aviation system.

So, one question is very clear that I need to ask is how can the administration expect to fix the ATC system when it is pushing out the very people that support, operate, and maintain the ATC system?

To grow the workforce, invest in deploying safety technologies, and protect the flying public, this administration must stay focused on implementation of the law as we passed it. The many reports of aviation incidents are a solemn reminder that we can't delay fixing issues that we have the power to solve now. Today is an important opportunity to learn more about how the FAA is implementing the law and other actions the agency must take to ensure safer skies for the flying public.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. With that, I yield back.

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

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

Thank you, Chairman Graves, for calling today's oversight hearing on the implementation of the landmark 2024 FAA Reauthorization law.

One year ago, Congress took decisive action to improve aviation safety, foster aerospace innovation, grow our workforce and better protect the flying public.

While the FAA is making some progress in implementing the law, recent tragic aviation accidents and close calls make clear that the Administration must prioritize the critical safety reforms included in the reauthorization.

The immense loss that occurred from the tragic mid-air collision at Washington National Airport (DCA) highlights the need for the FAA and Congress to recommit to enhancing the safety of the national airspace system (NAS) and restoring the flying public's confidence in that system.

Unfortunately, recent events have shown the problems we are seeing in the aviation industry extend much further than the issues that led to the heartbreaking plane crash on January 29.

Shortly after this crash, there were several other fatal commercial crashes or safety accidents in Alaska, Philadelphia, Arizona and other places around the country.

In the last six weeks alone, there have been an ongoing series of high profile, troubling accidents, including:

- A helicopter conducting commercial air tours crashing into the Hudson River;
- Two loss of separation events at DCA between a Black Hawk helicopter and a commercial airline flight;
- The wingtip of a Bombardier CRJ900 striking an Embraer E175 on the taxiway at DCA;
- The FAA's NOTAM system—which provides essential real-time updates on conditions affecting flight safety—experiencing sudden outages; and
- At least three separate instances of air traffic control (ATC) equipment failures affecting Newark Airport alone, resulting in hundreds of delays and cancellations.

The American people are justifiably outraged and demand the FAA do more to make our system safer and more reliable, and we want to help.

The U.S. strives to be the gold standard in aviation safety. But that statement can ring hollow when there are almost daily reports of serious close calls or ATC system failures.

One of the most immediate and effective long-term solutions the FAA can do right now to make our system safer is to swiftly implement the 2024 FAA Reauthorization law.

That law, passed in a bipartisan manner, provides the FAA with a five-year roadmap on how the Administration can address many of the safety issues we've recently seen.

We gave you the what needs to be done list, and now we're in the how-to stage, and it's up to the FAA to implement.

For instance, earlier this week it was reported that the flight delays out of Newark Airport were in part due to only three controllers being on duty at the time, even though the staffing target was 14.

Although the FAA is working to hire the maximum number of controllers from the agency's ATC training academy, as required by the law, the Agency has yet to modernize staffing models for controllers and other aviation safety roles to meet the evolving needs of the NAS.

There have also been several recent near-misses and runway incursions at airports across the country, including DCA, Seattle, Chicago and Boston.

The reauthorization law requires the FAA to establish the Runway Safety Council, which would develop new strategies to address airport surface safety risks, identify and deploy airport surface surveillance technologies to all large and medium hub airports and conduct a review of existing systems to assess how legacy technologies can be improved.

And the law could help prevent future ATC disruptions—such as the recent NOTAM outage and numerous ATC system failures that have recently impacted Newark Airport—through its requirement that FAA audit its legacy ATC systems and make immediate improvements to any system deemed outdated or unsafe.

To be clear, there are policies the FAA should be considering that were not included in the law.

For instance, just last week, the Secretary announced a proposal that will help fund the modernization of new ATC facilities, systems and equipment. We have yet to receive a proposed budget for this proposal and such an important and costly plan will require vigorous oversight, but I do encourage Committee members to look at what the Secretary is proposing because I believe that it is a very positive step forward.

I look forward to working with Chairman Graves to develop bipartisan legislation that will help modernize our ATC system.

Unfortunately, the Administration's actions to shrink the federal workforce will undermine the FAA's ability to implement the reauthorization law and could jeopardize aviation safety.

For instance, over the last several months, the Administration has fired several hundred FAA probationary employees, signed buyouts with over 4,000 DOT employees—nearly half of which are from the FAA—and threatened FAA and other employees with unproductive email requests.

And earlier this month, the Administration announced it will conduct additional layoffs at DOT.

These layoffs could prevent not just the implementation of critical safety reforms included in the FAA reauthorization, but also prevent DOT from fixing the various challenges currently plaguing our aviation system.

So, one question that is very clear that I need to ask is how can the Administration expect to fix our ATC system when it is pushing out the very people that support, operate and maintain the ATC system?

To grow the aviation workforce, invest in deploying safety-critical technologies, and protect the flying public, this Administration must stay focused on implementing the 2024 FAA Reauthorization.

The many reports of aviation incidents are a solemn reminder that we can no longer delay fixing issues that we have the power to solve now.

Today is an opportunity to learn more about how the FAA is implementing the law and other actions the agency must take to ensure safer skies for the flying public.

Mr. GRAVES. So, again, I want to welcome our witnesses here. And briefly I want to take a moment to explain the lighting system.

Basically, green means go, and yellow means you are running out of time, and red means please conclude your remarks.

And with that, I would ask unanimous consent that all witnesses' full statements be included in the record.

And without objection, that is so ordered.

I would 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 might be submitted to them in writing.

And without objection, that is so ordered.

I would ask unanimous consent that the record remain open for 15 days for any additional comments and information submitted by

Members or our witnesses to be included in the record of today's hearing.

And without objection, that is so ordered.

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

And with that, we will start with Ms. Baker, who is the Deputy Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety.

You are recognized for 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, ACCOMPANIED BY FRANK McINTOSH, DEPUTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, AND WAYNE HEIBECK, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AIRPORTS, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION; AND DERRICK COLLINS, DIRECTOR, PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

TESTIMONY OF JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION

Ms. BAKER. Thank you very much. Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share some updates regarding the FAA's efforts to implement the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024.

The FAA has made significant progress in implementing the act's several hundred requirements during the past year. Together with my colleagues from the Air Traffic Organization and the Office of Airports here with me today, I will highlight several of these accomplishments.

Regarding direction to improve the FAA's communication and timely decisionmaking on matters before the agency, so far we have reduced the aircraft registration backlog, and applications are now processed within an average of 10 business days or less. We also shortened the timeframe for determining acceptance or rejection of air carrier, air operator, and air agency certificate applications.

We have improved the guidance that our inspector workforce uses while planning for production approval-holder inspections. We are also enhancing the processing and analysis of safety data. Specifically, the Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing system has incorporated advanced tools to process safety data more rapidly and produce safety intelligence to identify trends and mitigate risks.

As we enhance the safety of the National Airspace System for current users, we are also focused on integrating new and emerging aviation technologies, including advanced air mobility. Last month, Secretary Duffy announced the Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies to be operated by the Texas A&M University System. The center will play a pivotal role advancing aviation technologies, ensuring safe integration into the NAS, and drive innovation in aviation.

The FAA is ready for powered-lift, the first brandnew category of civil aircraft in almost a century. Last year, the FAA issued the

Special Federal Aviation Regulation on powered-lift instructor and pilot certification, pilot training, and operating rules.

President Trump and Secretary Duffy made clear their priority to deliver an all-new, state-of-the-art air traffic control system that makes air travel safer and more efficient for the American people. Last week, Secretary Duffy announced a plan to replace core infrastructure including radar, software, hardware, telecommunications networks, and facilities. The FAA has already accelerated the modernization of the Notice to Airmen System. We expect delivery by July of 2025, and are targeting deployment by September of 2025.

The FAA must recruit, train, and retain the best and brightest. Consistent with congressional direction in the act, the FAA is laser-focused on air traffic controllers and aviation safety inspectors. We are updating controller staffing targets across facilities to reflect FAA-NATCA workgroup negotiated levels.

Under Secretary Duffy's leadership, we accelerated the time to hire and streamlined the controller hiring process through targeted automation and process improvements. We are offering financial incentives to grow the new controller pipeline and retain our most experienced controllers, and we are using on-the-spot hiring authority for experienced military controllers to join the workforce.

The FAA is leveraging partnerships with colleges and universities to create another pipeline for controllers through the Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative. We expect these investments to assist staffing at critical Federal contract towers as we grow the controller workforce.

Aviation safety inspectors are frontline in safety oversight and are essential to execute our safety mission. The use of direct hire-authority, for example, on-the-spot hiring authority, has enabled the FAA to continue targeted recruitment for these mission-critical positions and accelerate the hiring process.

For our Nation's airports, we have updated airport improvement plan guidance that will benefit airport operators, and we are continuing to support the transition to fluorine-free firefighting foam and updated guidance for vertiports, which will support the integration of AAM.

We have made substantial progress implementing the requirements aimed at eliminating dangerous runway incidents. Since November of 2024, the FAA has added the Surface Awareness Initiative at 18 sites. We have more than 30 additional sites planned to go operational by the end of calendar year 2025, and we are rolling out new, enhanced safety technology at more than 70 airports.

The FAA is committed to implementing the FAA Reauthorization Act. We are confident we are making substantial and meaningful progress, and we intend to keep Congress advised of that progress. And we look forward to your questions.

[The joint prepared statement of Ms. Baker, Mr. McIntosh, and Mr. Heibeck follows:]

Joint Prepared Statement of Jodi Baker, Deputy Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety, Federal Aviation Administration; Frank McIntosh, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Air Traffic Organization, Federal Aviation Administration; and Wayne Heibeck, Deputy Associate Administrator for Airports, Federal Aviation Administration

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share some updates on behalf of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) regarding the agency's efforts to implement the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (the Act) as we approach the first anniversary of its enactment.

The Act, which runs through fiscal year 2028, communicates congressional priorities for the agency's mission to provide the world's safest, most efficient aerospace system. It is broad in scope and speaks to everything from FAA's staffing, ways to bolster many of the agency's oversight processes, and where to invest resources to support safety and efficiency for both conventional users and new entrants. The Act has several hundred requirements, the bulk of which fall primarily under the purview of the Aviation Safety Organization, the Air Traffic Organization, and the Office of Airports.

The FAA made significant progress in implementing the Act's requirements during the past year. We want to highlight some of those accomplishments for you today.

AVIATION SAFETY

Building on our commitment to continuous improvement of our certification process and safety oversight, we updated guidance applicable to our risk model for production approval holder inspections and implemented enhancements to the processing and analysis of safety data.

The Act requires the FAA to review and update its Production Approval Holder (PAH) risk model to ensure it adequately accounts for risk at facilities "during periods of increased production." [1] The FAA policy applicable to Aviation Safety Inspectors (ASI) overseeing PAH recognizes that changes in production rates—both increases and decreases—can increase risk. An FAA team reviewed the policy and determined that it would benefit from improved guidance on how to respond when a PAH experiences a change in production rate. As a result, in April, the FAA issued additional guidance to ASIs on performing a risk assessment when a PAH's production rate changes; how to use the risk assessment results; when to add audits; how to customize an audit plan to focus on the areas of highest risk; and which facilities and suppliers to audit.

Regarding the Act's direction to improve the Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing program (ASIAS) concerning safety data sharing and risk mitigation, the FAA accelerated the procurement of a commercially available solution to modernize ASIAS. This includes using commercial cloud-based solutions to store and process ASIAS data. More than 30 million digital flight records voluntarily submitted by airline stakeholders have moved to a cloud-based platform. ASIAS has also initiated the implementation of a new advanced technology tool to process safety data more rapidly and produce safety intelligence that we can use to identify trends and mitigate risks.[2]

As we implement the Act's requirements, we continually examine the effectiveness of our oversight processes and make necessary improvements to ensure accountability. We continue to maintain rigorous oversight of Boeing's manufacturing, including implementation of its safety management system. And we appreciate Congress's additional support in extending several provisions of the Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act and adding annual training requirements for Organization Designation Authorization unit members to include ethics, professionalism, and safety concern reporting processes.[3]

ADVANCED AVIATION OPERATIONS AND TECHNOLOGIES

As we enhance the safety of the national airspace system (NAS) for current users, we are also focused on integrating new and emerging aviation technologies, including Advanced Air Mobility (AAM). AAM is an umbrella term for aircraft that are typically highly automated, electrically powered, and have vertical take-off and landing capability. Last month, Secretary Duffy announced the establishment of the

[1] Pub. L. No. 118–63, § 314 (2024).
[2] *Id.*, § 348.
[3] *See* Pub. L. No. 116–260, Div. V, Title I, §§ 303–304, 306 (2020).

Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies (CAAT), to be operated by the Texas A&M University System.[4] The CAAT will play a pivotal role in advancing aviation technologies and ensuring their safe integration into the NAS. The center will also represent a collaboration between government, academia, and industry to drive innovation in aviation.

The Act contains several sections focused on supporting U.S. leadership in AAM.[5] Many AAM aircraft fall into the powered-lift category. We are pleased to report that the FAA is ready for powered-lift, which will be the first brand-new category of civil aircraft in almost a century. Late last year, the FAA met the Act's requirement for publishing a Special Federal Aviation Regulation on powered-lift instructor and pilot certification, pilot training, and operating rules.[6] The FAA will gather data and information through regulatory requirements and the Aviation Rulemaking Committee required by the Act to develop a permanent regulatory framework for powered-lift.

The Act also expresses congressional priorities for continuing to integrate unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), or drones, into the NAS. While the FAA provides regulatory relief to enable certain more complex UAS operations, such as operations beyond the operator's visual line of sight (BVLOS), normalizing BVLOS operations through rulemaking remains a top priority for the FAA.[7]

MODERNIZATION

As we work to integrate advanced aviation technologies and aircraft into the NAS, we must prioritize NAS modernization for increased capacity and efficiency. President Trump and Secretary Duffy made clear their priority to deliver an all-new, state-of-the-art air traffic control system that makes air travel safer and more efficient for the American people. In line with the Administration's priorities and congressional direction, the FAA's first step is accelerating the modernization of the Notice to Airmen (NOTAM) system this year, much earlier than originally planned. The system will be securely hosted in the cloud and have a scalable and resilient architecture. We expect delivery by July 2025 and are targeting operational deployment of the modernized service by September 2025.

FAA PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

The Act directs the FAA to improve communication and timely decision-making on matters before the agency, including applications for aircraft registration and air carrier certification. We agree that there is room for process improvements and increased accountability to our stakeholders. Thus far, we have reduced the aircraft registration backlog, and applications are now processed within an average of 10 business days or less.[8]

We also shortened the time frame for determining acceptance or rejection of air carrier, air operator, and air agency certificate applications. Notably, while the target set by Congress is for the FAA to maintain an average application or rejection timeframe of less than 60 days for part 135 air carrier certificates within one year of enactment, the average acceptance or rejection timeframe for these applications is now just 31 business days.[9] We attribute the resulting timeliness and backlog improvements to adjustments to documentation requirements during the design assessment phase to streamline single pilot air carrier certifications under 14 CFR part 135, the establishment of a Flight Standards certification team that exclusively focuses on certification projects to assist with additional certification capacity, and policy enhancements to foster applicant accountability and readiness.

FAA STAFFING

As Congress recognized in the Act, the FAA must recruit, train, and retain the best and brightest for our FAA team. The Act specifically considers both Air Traffic Controller staffing[10] and Aviation Safety Inspector (ASI) staffing.[11]

Controller staffing is a top priority as air traffic controllers play an essential role in keeping the American people safe. As required by the Act, we are updating con-

---

[4] Pub. L. No. 118–63, § 961 (2024).
[5] *See, e.g., id.*, § 951, et seq.
[6] *Id.*, § 955.
[7] *Id.*, § 930.
[8] *Id.*, § 817.
[9] *Id.*, § 818.
[10] *Id.*, § 437.
[11] *See id.*, §§ 428, 430.

troller staffing targets across facilities to reflect FAA–NATCA workgroup negotiated levels until we make adjustments to our controller staffing model.

We currently have over 10,750 air traffic controllers on the job, with more than 3,000 in training. We are on track to hire another 2,000 controller trainees this year. We are reviewing our hiring, training, and placement processes, as well as FAA Academy withdrawals and failures, to ensure our selection methods effectively identify candidates best suited for the controller profession.

Consistent with Secretary Duffy's announcement on supercharged air traffic controller hiring and our commitment to enhancing efficiency, we streamlined the hiring process through targeted automation and process improvements, which will accelerate the time-to-hire for these critical positions by five months or more, bringing new air traffic controllers on the job much faster. We also incentivized hiring with a 30 percent increase in the salary of those who qualify to attend the FAA's Academy. And we are already seeing positive results from these improvements.

Under Secretary Duffy's leadership, we are also offering financial incentives to new FAA controllers who complete initial qualification training. Additional financial incentives are also available to retain our most experienced controllers, and we are expanding opportunities for experienced military controllers to join the workforce using on-the-spot hiring authority to allow these veterans to bypass the normal announcement process. Air Traffic managers will be able to directly accept resumes from interested military controllers and help place them at their preferred location.

In addition to financial incentives, we are also leveraging partnerships with approved colleges and universities to create an additional pipeline for controllers through the Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative (AT–CTI). The Enhanced AT–CTI authorizes institutions to provide the same training provided by the FAA. After passing the Air Traffic Skills Assessment, meeting the FAA's medical and security requirements, passing performance evaluations, and receiving an endorsement certificate, Enhanced AT–CTI graduates can report directly to an FAA facility to begin their on-the-job training.

The benefits of the many investments in controller training and hiring will not be limited to just FAA facilities. We also expect these investments to assist staffing at critical Federal Contract Towers as we grow the controller workforce.

ASI hiring is also essential to our ability to execute our safety mission. ASIs are the frontline in safety oversight. Congressional direction for the FAA to use direct-hire authority (e.g., on-the-spot hiring authority) has enabled the FAA to continue targeted recruitment for these mission-critical positions, and it allows the FAA to accept resumes outside of the normal announcement process for all service locations. Use of on-the-spot hiring authority is an effective tool in hiring ASI positions. On-the-spot hiring authority will continue to enable the FAA to accelerate the hiring process by extending offers of employment to fully mission-qualified candidates faster in a highly competitive labor market.

AIRPORTS

Our nation's airports are vital to connecting communities, sustaining jobs, and moving people and goods where they need to go. The FAA appreciates the increase in the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) authorization to $4 billion for fiscal years 2025 through 2028 to invest in airports across the country so that communities, large and small, can continue to safely and efficiently connect with the rest of the world.[12] AIP grants support projects that improve safety and efficiency and keep the pavement of our nation's airports in good, safe condition for pilots and the flying public; preserve and improve critical airfield infrastructure at more than 3,200 public-use airports nationwide to support a continued focus on safety-related development projects; and facilitate the safe and efficient integration of new and innovative technologies into airport operations.

We're also working hard to implement other requirements, such as updating AIP guidance that will benefit airport operators[13], continuing to support the transition to fluorine-free firefighting foam[14], and updating guidance for vertiports[15], which will support future integration of AAM.

RUNWAY SAFETY

Runway safety remains one of our highest priorities. We made substantial progress in implementing section 347 of the Act, which expresses our shared intent

[12] *Id.*, § 101.
[13] *See id.*, §§ 733 and 737.
[14] *See id.*, § 767.
[15] *Id.*, § 958.

with Congress to eliminate all dangerous runway incidents. In November 2024, the Air Traffic Organization briefed the Runway Safety Council on airport surface safety technologies. The council identified the Surface Awareness Initiative as an additional tool that expands surface situational awareness for controllers at 18 airports without existing surface surveillance capabilities. Since the briefing in November 2024, all 18 sites are operational, with more than 30 additional sites planned to go operational by the end of calendar year 2025. In addition, we announced that we are rolling out new enhanced safety technology at more than 70 airports. Runway Incursion Devices are memory aids for air traffic controllers that indicate when a runway is occupied or closed. Runway Incursion Devices are one of three situational-awareness solutions in the FAA's fast-tracked surface safety portfolio.

CONCLUSION

The FAA is committed to implementing the provisions of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. Our employees work hard to achieve the goals and directives mandated by Congress in the Act. We are confident that we are making substantial and meaningful progress, and we intend to keep Congress apprised of that progress regularly. Thank you again for the opportunity to address the Committee. We look forward to answering your questions.

Mr. GRAVES. Let's see. Next we have Mr. Collins, who is the Director of Physical Infrastructure at GAO.

You are recognized for 5 minutes.

TESTIMONY OF DERRICK COLLINS, DIRECTOR, PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE, U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Mr. COLLINS. Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss GAO's work related to FAA's efforts to implement the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024.

The act communicates congressional direction for how FAA should carry out aspects of its mission, and helps ensure the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System. The act also contains 36 mandates for GAO to undertake various studies, and requires that FAA implement various GAO recommendations related to our past work. While FAA has taken several actions to implement the act, my remarks will highlight challenges FAA faces modernizing the National Airspace System and enhancing the aviation workforce, as well as GAO's recent and ongoing work in these areas and our open recommendations.

Our recent work related to airspace modernization has focused on the condition of legacy IT systems and NextGen implementation. In September 2024, we reported that 76 percent of FAA's 138 air traffic control systems were unsustainable, or potentially unsustainable, and that FAA had been slow to modernize these systems. Our November 2023 report on the status of NextGen modernization efforts found that since 2018, FAA had made mixed progress across NextGen programs. We made a total of 11 recommendations in these 2 reports to help FAA address modernization delays and challenges. Of these, nine have not yet been fully implemented. However, FAA has actions underway to address them.

Our recent work related to air traffic controller staffing and enhancing the aviation workforce has focused on addressing employee skills gaps. We have three open recommendations that aim to ensure FAA's workforce has the needed skills and to help FAA pre-

pare for changes in technology. FAA concurred with these recommendations and has various actions underway to complete implementation.

Additionally, we have ongoing work on challenges FAA may face in recruiting, hiring, and training new air traffic controllers, and how, if at all, FAA has assessed the effectiveness of its processes for doing so.

In response to the act, we also have ongoing work related to airport service workers, the regional airline pilot workforce, the FAA national simulator program, and high school aviation training.

In closing, there are currently 50 open GAO recommendations to FAA from reports that we have issued since 2020. Implementing these open recommendations will help position FAA to fulfill its commitment to ensuring that the United States has the safest, most efficient airspace system in the world. We look forward to working with the committee to ensure implementation of the important provisions in the act and to provide support through the work we have underway in response to the act.

This concludes my statement. I will be happy to answer any questions.

[Mr. Collins' prepared statement follows:]

Prepared Statement of Derrick Collins, Director, Physical Infrastructure, U.S. Government Accountability Office

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION: KEY PROVISIONS IN THE 2024 REAUTHORIZATION ACT AND RELATED GAO WORK

HIGHLIGHTS

What GAO Found

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024 (the Act) communicates congressional direction for how FAA should carry out aspects of its mission and helps ensure the safety and efficiency of the U.S. airspace system. The Act is broad and contains provisions on areas including FAA's organizational structure, controller staffing and aviation workforce, modernizing the national airspace system (NAS), and supporting safety and efficiency for both conventional users and new entrants such as drones.

Source: Soonthorn/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-25-108502

The Act contains 36 provisions for GAO to study various issues related to FAA and the NAS. In addition, the Act requires FAA to implement various GAO recommendations. GAO has 50 open recommendations to FAA that address, for example:

- Air traffic control modernization delays and challenges and urgent actions needed to address aging legacy IT systems.
- Certifying small aircraft and aviation products, better preventing and detecting fraud and abuse in aircraft registration, and sharing information with law enforcement on persons who intentionally point lasers at aircraft.
- Challenges related to skill gaps and assessing training in critical competencies to ensure FAA's aviation workforce can help it prepare for changes in technology.
- Integrating new operations—such as drones and commercial space vehicles—into the NAS, while ensuring safety and efficiency.

GAO maintains that implementing these recommendations will better position FAA to address the widespread challenges it faces in modernizing the NAS and fulfilling its commitment to ensuring that the U.S. has the safest, most efficient airspace system in the world.

Why GAO Did This Study

With over 45,000 flights daily, the U.S. national airspace system is the busiest and most complex in the world. FAA is responsible for regulating and overseeing civil aviation within the U.S. Its primary mission is to ensure the safety and efficiency of air transportation, including air traffic control, aircraft certification, and certain airport operations.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 was signed into law on May 16, 2024, and authorizes FAA activities through fiscal year 2028. Congress directed FAA to take various actions to maintain and improve the safety and efficiency of air transportation while accommodating new entrants such as drones and commercial space vehicles.

This testimony provides an overview of key areas of the Act, GAO's open recommendations to FAA in these areas, and the work GAO is doing in response to several provisions in the Act. This statement draws from several GAO reports completed since fiscal year 2020.

What GAO Recommends

There are currently 50 open GAO recommendations to FAA from reports that GAO has issued since 2020. These recommendations cut across several FAA activities addressed by the Act including modernization of the NAS, aviation safety, FAA's workforce, and integrating new entrants, such as drones, into the NAS. In most cases, FAA concurred with GAO's recommendations and is taking actions to address them.

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to participate in today's hearing on the implementation of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024 (the Act). As you know, the Act was signed into law on May 16, 2024, and authorizes FAA activities through fiscal year 2028. It communicates congressional direction for how FAA should carry out aspects of its mission and helps ensure the safety and efficiency of the U.S. airspace system. The Act is broad and includes provisions on FAA's organizational structure, air traffic controller staffing and aviation workforce, and modernization of the national airspace system (NAS), and supporting safety and efficiency for both conventional airspace users and new entrants such as drones.[1]

FAA has stated that much of this legislation aligns with the agency's existing priorities and approaches and specifies where Congress is most interested in seeing adjustments to resources and timelines for various activities. FAA believes the Act supports the needs of the aviation ecosystem and that its many provisions will help advance aviation into the future. FAA has stated that it is committed to implementing the requirements in the Act as efficiently as possible.

My testimony today provides an overview of key areas of the Act, our open recommendations to FAA in these areas, and the work we are doing in response to several provisions in the Act. The Act contains 36 provisions for GAO to undertake various studies. It also requires FAA to implement various GAO recommendations from several of our past reports.

This statement focuses on key statutory provisions, our related work, and our prior recommendations in the following areas: airspace modernization, aviation safety improvements, air traffic controller staffing and aviation workforce, airport infrastructure, and new entrants to the NAS—drones, advanced air mobility (AAM), and commercial space aircraft.[2]

We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

AIRSPACE MODERNIZATION

FAA's primary mission is to ensure the safety and efficiency of more than 45,000 flights operating daily in the NAS—the busiest and most complex airspace in the world. Critical to this effort are numerous air traffic control systems that enable air traffic controllers to monitor weather, conduct navigation and surveillance, manage communications, and more.

The Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) is FAA's multi-decade program to modernize the NAS and increase the safety and efficiency of air travel. In November 2023, we reported that FAA had spent over $14 billion on NextGen from fiscal year 2007 through fiscal year 2022.[3] FAA projected in 2018 that, in total, NextGen would cost the federal government and industry at least $35 billion through 2030.

The Act directs FAA to sunset the NextGen office, which has been overseeing airspace modernization efforts over the past 15 years, at the end of 2025. In its place, the Act calls for the establishment of an Airspace Modernization Office responsible for continuous modernization of the NAS, development of a future information-centric NAS, and more.

---

[1] The NAS is a shared network of U.S. airspace; air navigation facilities, equipment, and services; airports or landing areas; aeronautical charts, information, and services; rules, regulations, and procedures; technical information; and manpower and material.

[2] AAM is a transportation system that is comprised of urban air mobility and regional air mobility using manned or unmanned aircraft. Urban air mobility and regional air mobility use an airworthy aircraft that (A) has advanced technologies, such as distributed propulsion, vertical takeoff and landing, powered lift, nontraditional power systems, or autonomous technologies; and (B) has a maximum takeoff weight of greater than 1,320 pounds. FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, Pub. L. No. 118–63, § 951, 138 Stat. 1025, 1375.

[3] GAO, *Air Traffic Control Modernization: Program Management Improvements Could Help FAA Address NextGen Delays and Challenges*, GAO–24–105254 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 9, 2023). The $14 billion reflects FAA's actual budget for NextGen from fiscal year 2007 through fiscal year 2022, as reported in its Congressional Budget Justification. However, this amount may not account for all NextGen activities during those years. For example, FAA officials noted that pre-2008, the agency did not identify individual programs and activities as NextGen in its budget documents. FAA estimated in 2018 that NextGen would cost FAA about $22 billion and industry about $13 billion by 2030.

According to FAA, an information-centric NAS will focus on leveraging information technology and data to create a more flexible, collaborative, and efficient airspace. According to the Act, the office will also develop a plan ensuring that the national airspace system meets the future safety, security, mobility, efficiency, and capacity needs of a diverse and growing set of airspace users.

Our work related to airspace modernization in recent years has focused on the condition of legacy IT systems and NextGen implementation. In September 2024, we reported that 76 percent of FAA's 138 air traffic control systems were unsustainable or potentially unsustainable.[4] However, we found that FAA had been slow to modernize these systems. For the selected systems we reviewed, FAA planned to take, on average, a decade to modernize them, with some taking over 12 years or more. Our November 2023 report on the status of NextGen modernization efforts found that since 2018, FAA had made mixed progress across NextGen programs.[5]

We made a total of 11 recommendations in these two reports to help FAA address modernization delays and challenges and modernize aging systems. Of these, nine have not been fully implemented; however FAA has some actions underway to address them.

AVIATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

FAA has stated its priority is to advance the safety of the nation's airspace system. The Act directs FAA to take action in a number of areas related to aviation safety. For example, the Act requires reviews of aircraft type certification processes and FAA use of aviation safety data. The Act clarifies that FAA has the exclusive authority to impose regulations to assure the cybersecurity of civilian aircraft, engines, propellers, and appliances. In addition, the Act calls for new qualification requirements for aircraft maintenance staff and mandates new ethics training for employees in units of aircraft manufacturers that are delegated certain FAA authorities, such as issuing aircraft certification.

Our recent work on aviation safety has highlighted the need for action in several areas. For example, we have:

- Two open recommendations to FAA related to certifying small aircraft to help improve safety, reduce regulatory cost burden, and spur innovation and technology.[6]
- Four open recommendations on the effectiveness of international agreements for certifications of aviation products, to help FAA evaluate the effectiveness of the agreements.[7]
- One open recommendation and one matter for congressional consideration related to drone detection and mitigation technology.[8]
- One open recommendation to help FAA collect and share information with law enforcement for investigating incidents of persons intentionally aiming lasers at aircraft.[9]

FAA concurred with these recommendations and has various actions underway to implement them. Fully implementing our recommendations in these areas will improve safety in the NAS. In response to provisions in the Act, we have ongoing studies of FAA's comprehensive and strategic framework for aircraft cybersecurity, and funding for FAA safety research and development.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLER STAFFING AND AVIATION WORKFORCE

The aviation industry relies on a highly skilled workforce, which includes air traffic controllers, pilots, and aircraft mechanics The Act contains several provisions related to air traffic controller staffing and enhancing the aviation workforce.

---

[4] GAO, *Air Traffic Control: FAA Actions Are Urgently Needed to Modernize Aging Systems*, GAO–24–107001 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 23, 2024).

[5] GAO–24–105254.

[6] GAO, *Aviation Certification: FAA Needs to Strengthen Its Design Review Process for Small Airplanes*, GAO–21–85 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 16, 2020).

[7] GAO, *Aviation Certification: FAA Should Evaluate Effectiveness of the International Validation Process*, GAO–24–106040 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 10, 2024). We use the term drone detection technology when referring only to technology capable of detecting, identifying, monitoring, or tracking an unmanned aircraft, and the term drone mitigation technology when referring only to technology capable of deterring, preventing, responding to, and minimizing the immediate consequences of safety and security threats posed by drone operations.

[8] GAO, *Aviation Safety: Federal Efforts to Address Unauthorized Drone Flights Near Airports*, GAO–24–107195 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 18, 2024).

[9] GAO, *Aviation Safety: FAA Should Strengthen Efforts to Address the Illegal Practice of Intentionally Aiming Lasers at Aircraft*, GAO–22–104664 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 26, 2022).

For example, the Act directs FAA to maximize hiring of air traffic controllers (subject to the availability of appropriations), identify limiting factors on the ability to hire and retain air traffic controllers, and conduct a study on instructor recruitment, hiring, and retention. It also requires FAA to make simulation technologies more accessible and improve these technologies. The Act calls for the Transportation Research Board to study and report on which staffing models and methodologies best account for the operational staffing needs of the air traffic control system.

In addition, the Act expands an existing aviation workforce development grant program for training future pilots and directs FAA to establish a program to allow qualified air carriers to provide enhanced training for first officer prospects. The Act also expands an existing grant program related to aviation maintenance technical careers and establishes a new workforce development program focused on the aviation manufacturing technical workforce. Further, the Act directs FAA to revise regulations related to aviation maintenance technician certification for applicants with relevant military experience.

We have three open recommendations related to skill gaps and assessing training in critical competencies,[10] and related to using quantitative information about gaps in critical skills across mission-critical occupations.[11] These recommendations aim to ensure FAA's workforce has the needed skills and to help FAA prepare for changes in technology. FAA concurred with these recommendations and has various actions underway to implement them.

We have ongoing work on challenges FAA may face in recruiting, hiring, and training new air traffic controllers and how, if at all, FAA has assessed the effectiveness of its processes for doing so. In response to the Act, we also have ongoing work related to airport service workers, the regional airline pilot workforce, the FAA National Simulator Program, and high school aviation training.

AIRPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

U.S. airports are important contributors to the U.S. economy, providing mobility for people and goods, both domestically and internationally. About 3,300 airports in the U.S. are part of the national airport system and eligible to receive federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP) grants to fund infrastructure projects. The Act expands eligible projects and authorizes additional funding. Airport infrastructure provisions in the Act address a range of issues including conducting a study of regional airport capacity and the establishing of grant pilot programs for regional airport accessibility and increasing usable runway length.

Our prior work related to modernizing airport infrastructure has focused on funding and financing planned infrastructure projects and airports' efforts to enhance the resilience of their electrical power systems.[12] Among other things, this work identified the roles and funding sources available for improving airport infrastructure. In response to provisions in the Act, we have ongoing studies related to air cargo infrastructure and operations, air cargo in Puerto Rico, airport transit access and transportation, airport financial reporting, and airport power generation. We also plan to begin work on state block grants for the AIP, fixed base operators' commitment to online transparency of prices and fees, and grants to airports in the Republics of the Marshall Islands and Palau, and the Federated states of Micronesia.[13] This work will help inform efforts related to airport infrastructure.

NEW ENTRANTS TO THE NATIONAL AIRSPACE SYSTEM

New entrants to the NAS include drones, AAM aircraft, and commercial space vehicles. FAA is actively working to integrate these new operations into the NAS while ensuring safety and efficiency with conventional airspace users.

Among several provisions related to new entrants, the Act directs FAA to develop regulations allowing for routine operations of drones beyond visual line of sight, which could expand advanced operations such as package delivery and infrastruc-

---

[10] GAO, *Aviation Safety: FAA's Office of Aviation Safety Should Take Additional Actions to Ensure Its Workforce Has Needed Skills*, GAO–21–94 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 9, 2020).

[11] GAO, *FAA Workforce: Better Assessing Employees' Skill Gaps Could Help FAA Prepare for Changes in Technology*, GAO–21–310 (Washington, D.C.: May 13, 2021).

[12] GAO, *Airport Infrastructure: Information on Funding and Financing for Planned Projects*, GAO–20–298 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 13, 2020); and GAO, *Airport Infrastructure: Selected Airports' Efforts to Enhance Electrical Resilience*, GAO–23–105203 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 29, 2023).

[13] According to FAA, a fixed base operator is a business granted the right by the airport to operate fueling facilities, hangars, aircraft tie-downs, aircraft rental, aircraft maintenance, flight instruction, and other aeronautical services at an airport.

ture inspections. The Act also requires FAA to establish a process to approve third party vendors, including those providing air traffic management services for drone operations. Further, the Act extends a program to study integration of drones into the NAS and establishes new grant programs for drone infrastructure inspection and drone education and workforce training.

The Act also directs FAA to finalize rules regarding pilot training requirements for vertical lift aircraft used in AAM applications and directs FAA to take necessary steps to integrate such aircraft into the NAS.

Our recent work in this area has focused on drone integration and commercial space infrastructure, where we have several open recommendations to FAA. These recommendations include the need for FAA to:

- Plan and share information on the development of drone traffic management systems,[14]
- Align FAA's drone integration strategy with elements of a comprehensive strategy and develop lessons learned from FAA's drone research programs,[15]
- Better communicate with applicants for FAA waivers from certain regulations.[16]
- Better communicate with law enforcement and coordinate with federal partners.[17]
- Improve FAA's efforts related to counter-drone technologies at airports.[18]

Related to commercial space, we have open recommendations related to providing Congress with information on the range of options to support space transportation infrastructure and the mishap investigation process. These recommendations, if implemented, would better position the federal government and Congress to make well-informed commercial space investment decisions and to protect public safety.[19]

These recommendations collectively are intended to help FAA integrate these new operations while ensuring safety and efficiency. FAA concurred with most of our recommendations related to new entrants and has various actions underway to implement them. In response to a provision in the Act, we have initiated studies on drone detect and avoid technology and electric propulsion aircraft operations.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GAO RECOMMENDATIONS

The Act contains provisions directing FAA to implement our recommendations from several recently issued reports. In particular:

- The Act directs FAA to establish a mechanism by January 2026 to make helicopter noise complaint data accessible to FAA, helicopter operators, and the public on an FAA website, based on a recommendation we made in 2021.[20]
- The Act also directs FAA to implement our 2021 recommendations to improve FAA's outreach to local communities impacted by aircraft noise. For example, we recommended that FAA identify supplemental metrics on the effects of noise on these communities.[21]
- The Act directs FAA to implement our recommendations related to its strategy for drone integration, mentioned earlier.[22]
- The Act directs FAA to implement our 2020 recommendations related to better preventing, detecting, and responding to fraud and abuse risks in aircraft registration.[23]

---

[14] GAO, *Unmanned Aircraft Systems: FAA Could Strengthen Its Implementation of a Drone Traffic Management System by Improving Communication and Measuring Performance*, GAO–21–165 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 28, 2021).

[15] GAO, *Drones: FAA Should Improve Its Approach to Integrating Drones into the National Airspace System*, GAO–23–105189 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 26, 2023).

[16] GAO–23–105189

[17] GAO, *Drones: Actions Needed to Better Support Remote Identification in the National Airspace*, GAO–24–106158 (Washington, D.C.: June 6, 2024).

[18] GAO, *Aviation Safety: Federal Efforts to Address Unauthorized Drone Flights Near Airports*, GAO–24–107195 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 18, 2024).

[19] GAO, *Commercial Space Transportation: FAA Should Examine a Range of Options to Support U.S. Launch Infrastructure*, GAO–21–154 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 22, 2020); and GAO, *Commercial Space Transportation: FAA Should Improve Its Mishap Investigation Process*, GAO–24–105561 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 7, 2023).

[20] GAO, *Aircraft Noise: Better Information Sharing Could Improve Responses to Washington, D.C. Area Helicopter Noise Concerns*, GAO–21–200 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 7, 2021).

[21] GAO, *Aircraft Noise: FAA Could Improve Outreach Through Enhanced Noise Metrics, Communication, and Support to Communities*, GAO–21–103933 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 28, 2021).

[22] GAO–23–105189

[23] GAO, *Aviation: FAA Needs to Better Prevent, Detect, and Respond to Fraud and Abuse Risks in Aircraft Registration*, GAO–20–164 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 25, 2020).

We urge FAA to implement these and other open GAO recommendations, including those I highlighted earlier. In total, we currently have 50 open recommendations to FAA from reports that we have issued since fiscal year 2020. Implementing these recommendations will better position FAA to address the widespread challenges it faces in modernizing the NAS, and to fulfill its commitment to ensuring that the United States has the safest, most efficient airspace system in the world.

We look forward to continuing to work with this Committee to ensure implementation of the important provisions in the Act and to provide support through the work we have underway in response to the Act.

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, and Members of the Committee, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions that you may have at this time.

Mr. GRAVES. That concludes the testimony from our witnesses, and I will now open it for questions.

And Mr. Collins touched on this, but my question is actually for Mr. McIntosh. One of the key organizational reforms that we put in the FAA reauthorization was the termination of the Office of NextGen, which I think was a perfect example of just how messed up bureaucracy can be when it comes to implementing law, period.

But the NextGen program, it has been plagued by delays, and it failed to achieve its goal of increasing efficiency, increasing capacity and flexibility in our national airspace. So, my question is, there are obviously several provisions that the FAA is supposed to achieve that the Office of NextGen never did achieve in terms of modernization. So, what specific steps is FAA taking to learn from those shortcomings from the Office of NextGen and to ensure effective implementation of critical airspace modernization efforts?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question, sir. For the Air Traffic Organization, what we are ensuring is what we are responsible for as far as the implementation of a lot of the NextGen items are being completed, some of those NextGen items being DataComm, which is now fully—is in all of our continental en route centers and are close to being IOC, meaning operational. We are expecting those to be operational this year.

We are seeing the rollout of our Terminal Flight Data Management systems throughout the program, as well as a number of our PBN procedures. We are working very closely with our stakeholders to make sure that they equip correctly so we can take advantage of a lot of these NextGen technologies.

Another important piece, in my opinion, sir, is standing up the AMO office, which is the Airspace Modernization Office. And I do know that my senior leadership is taking that, and I am expecting for that office to be stood up relatively quickly. I know that we are within timelines of getting that done, and when that is getting done, I look forward to partnering with the new AMO and ensuring that those NextGen technologies are fully executed.

Mr. GRAVES. Okay, next question for Ms. Baker.

I mentioned and I touched on the GA title, which—again, I am very, very proud of that. But my question is, can you highlight some of the key provisions that the FAA has already implemented, and going through that process and their importance to general aviation?

Ms. BAKER. Absolutely. And my son is actually an aspiring pilot, so, we are getting ready to go through the GA segment, as well. So, he starts school in the fall. We are very excited.

Some of the things that we immediately implemented were around expansion of BasicMed, which is a medical certification, risk-appropriate medical certification for low-risk general aviation operations. Also, enabling BasicMed for those doing checks and those types of operations, as well. We have instituted our medical bill of rights, which informs aspiring pilots and pilots applying for Airman Medical on their rights for interaction with aviation medical examiners.

We removed the requirement to have an expiration date on your flight instructor certificate because that appeared to be unnecessary bureaucracy. We recently published guidance on all makes and models for those operating experimental aircraft. We have gotten the registration down for an aircraft registration down to 10 days, so you get your aircraft registration quickly, as well as we are working to enable use of an electronic registration in that period of time that you may not be actually holding the physical registration.

Additionally, we are making changes around designated pilot examiners. We have set up our national Office for Designated Pilot Examiners, and we have already implemented a way for individuals getting checks from DPEs to provide FAA input on the performance using the FAA hotline. We are looking to improve the electronic interaction with DPEs, so we are working to implement those provisions where you can see online a DPE schedule to make that more efficient, and similar to how we run the rest of our life.

Mr. GRAVES. That's fantastic, actually. All of these things are important to me, every single one of them and more, so I look forward to everything being implemented that was in the GA title.

So, Rick?

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Baker, I want to start with, if you could, provide a brief update on the FAA's oversight of the Boeing action plan, the safety and quality plan. Where does FAA assess Boeing is in that process?

Ms. BAKER. Thank you for the question.

So, the FAA increased its oversight of Boeing after the door plug accident of January 2024. We have continued that enhanced oversight. We are still in the factory day by day. We are working closely with the actual mechanics and the factory as Boeing executes its plan.

They are making progress against their safety and quality plan. I have been in the factory twice over the past year, and I have seen changes that they have made to employee training. I have seen changes how they are implementing their SMS. So they are proceeding with the execution of their safety and quality plan, and we continue to be there daily as they continue to execute.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. And do you anticipate FAA being in the plant for quite some time still?

Ms. BAKER. I think because the plan includes not just observations from our special audit and their own special audit, but there are also cultural pieces that came up out of the section 103 expert panel review, I anticipate safety culture activities will continue for some time.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thanks.

Mr. McIntosh, it is my understanding the FAA is continuing its review of airport hotspots after the tragic DCA mid-air collision. What are the latest findings of this review?

Mr. MCINTOSH. In regards to airport——

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON [interrupting]. This would be the airplane and helicopter interaction at other airports.

Mr. MCINTOSH. There is a mixed traffic study, I believe, is what you are referring to, sir.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Sure.

Mr. MCINTOSH. So, that was direct action that we took from DCA is what lessons learned can we take and apply them to other airports that have similar traffic patterns between mixed traffic, meaning helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. And we have identified 10 facilities that had charted helicopter routes near airports, and we have been reviewing those cities to make sure that those charted helicopter routes have lateral confines and vertical confines to ensure that aircraft are safely separated between that mixed environment.

And we are seeing corrective action plans take place already, sir. We have identified Las Vegas as having some charted helicopter routes that were fairly close to Las Vegas International Airport. We took corrective actions, and we have established lateral confines and vertical confines to ensure that those helicopter routes are safe from arriving and departing aircraft out of Las Vegas.

As well as working with our labor partners to ensure that our training is adequate for a lot of these—for when we see these mixed traffic patterns, mainly the exchange of traffic advisories, making sure that helicopters know exactly what the aircraft pattern altitudes were, making sure they were clear of traffic.

These corrective action plans are part of our SMS process, part of our QA/QC process, quality assurance/quality control. And if we see any safety drift there from our data points, we want to make sure that we mitigate it proactively versus reactionary. So, we are learning from that event, and we are applying those lessons learned to these 10 other airports that I am speaking to.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes, thanks.

Mr. Collins, did you do any assessment or have you been asked to yet do an assessment about the loss of Federal employees at the FAA as it relates to activities related to certification of airplanes, of airplane components?

One of the complaints we heard and tried to incorporate into the 2024 bill was to ensure the FAA had the people to complete certification of parts and components, and so, I am wondering if you have done any assessment or have been asked to do any assessment about the relationship between the loss of employees and certification efforts.

Mr. COLLINS. To date, we have not received a request to do that work, but we would be happy to chat with your staff about that.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Let's see, I had a set of questions here.

Mr. Heibeck, one of the things we have been tracking is—is it Heibeck? Is that right? Yes, Heibeck—we have been tracking is grants that have been awarded, signed, and obligated; grants have

been awarded, not signed, and frozen, and so on. With regards to either AIP grants or ATP grants—Airport Terminal Program grants, I guess it's called, I forget the name—that came out of the IIJA, do you have any direction? Can you give us any guidance about any grants that are being frozen, or you are not yet getting guidance about releasing moneys at all?

Mr. HEIBECK. Thank you for the question, Congressman. And no, we are moving forward with issuing all types of grants. Let me handle the Airport Improvement Program first.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes.

Mr. HEIBECK. We thank Congress for the $4 billion, which is a significant increase in the AIP. That took a little time to get the apportionment out. We cannot start moving those grants until we have an apportionment. We should start seeing those grants going out to airports shortly.

We recently announced $790 million of IIJA funding, or Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding, that is moving out.

And on the Airport Terminal Program grants, as airports are ready to move forward, we like to have all their documents in, including bids, as they are ready to move forward. We are doing one last review of those and moving those forward, as well. We have had about 40 of those moving forward right now.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. About 40?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes.

Mr. LARSEN OF WASHINGTON. Yes, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. NEHLS [presiding]. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Webster, 5 minutes.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Heibeck, what actions does the FAA plan to take in the next 6 months to accelerate airport development?

Mr. HEIBECK. I am sorry, I didn't catch the last part of that.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay. What plans does the FAA have to accelerate development for airport development?

Mr. HEIBECK. Okay. So I think that question probably gets at the heart of the prerequisite requirements that go into development, specifically environmental reviews, and we have taken several actions, or are taking several actions to try and accelerate environmental reviews.

We have proposed new categorical exclusions to the Council on Environmental Quality. We are also reviewing other agencies in categorical exclusions to determine if there are categorical exclusions from other agencies that we can apply. And I probably should have started with we have provided guidance to the field, to our field offices regarding the presumed categorical exclusions for environmental review that was in the reauthorization bill. And we presume a categorical exclusion if there is limited Federal funding or under $6 million.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay. Well, that kind of answers my next question, which was: Are you going to evaluate improvements to NEPA for the process being used on airport development?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes, absolutely. Our—sorry, getting some feedback—our Office of Environment and Energy is right now reviewing and updating our NEPA implementing policies and procedures,

order 1050. As part of that review, they will be looking at further streamlining our environmental processes consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality memo February of 2025.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Mr. McIntosh, I appreciate Secretary Duffy's commitment to cleaning up the backlog of more than 3,200 projects that were left over from the Biden administration by reversing burdensome regulatory requirements that delayed critical infrastructure investments.

Tampa International Airport is working with the FAA on securing funds for a much needed new air traffic control tower. However, conversations regarding this funding have stalled. Are you able to provide an update on this project, when Tampa International will receive that funding?

Mr. MCINTOSH. For an air traffic control tower replacement, sir?

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH. So there are 350 FAA-owned, maintained towers, some as old as 60 years old. And we do have a process of prioritizing which air traffic controllers are replaced.

It is all part of a formula. The formula takes account age of a facility; tower line of sight, meaning what is the ability of an air traffic controller to look out the windows, ensure that they can see all of the surface environment to include the runways, the taxiways, around some of the gates, things along that nature; as well as what we call the actual facility condition, right? How old is it? Is it in dilapidated states? Things along that line, as well as the overall operations. We base that score to develop a prioritized list, and that prioritized list is then acted upon.

But it takes time. We currently have 11 facilities that are pending replacement, and we are averaging about 1 tower per year. That is how long it takes. I am not—what I would like to do is—if it is all right, we can develop that list and then bring it to you and see exactly where your tower is on that list, sir.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. That would be very good, because if we are in negotiations, it has got to be closer to the top than the bottom, 11 years from now. You do it—you might negotiate some other way [inaudible]. So, I would say it is near the top.

Mr. MCINTOSH. If there are 350 towers that need to be replaced, we've got to stick to the process and see where it is. I can't tell you if it is near the top based on it being 10 or 11 years, as we are only placing one per year. What I would like to do is get that list and circle up with you and your staff, and we can tell you exactly where it is on that list.

Mr. WEBSTER OF FLORIDA. Okay. Thank you very much.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Ms. Norton for 5 minutes.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, Chair Graves and Ranking Member Larsen, for holding this important hearing.

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 FAA can take beyond these provisions

to improve aviation safety, including prohibiting nonessential helicopter flights in congested airspaces.

Ms. Baker, why has the FAA not prohibited military helicopters from transporting officials in nonemergency situations near DCA?

Ms. BAKER. I am actually going to defer that question to Mr. McIntosh.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question, ma'am. That is part of the discussion right now, is reviewing exactly that and seeing the necessity, and having conversations with DoD and talking about possible restrictions. Everything is on the table right now in our review to make sure that we keep a safe environment for the vicinity around DCA.

Ms. NORTON. Very important.

I was pleased the Acting FAA Administrator announced at a Senate hearing in March that the FAA is now requiring ADS–B transponders turned on for helicopter flights in the DCA class B airspace, but there has been no update to the FAA's website where ADS–B Out requirements are listed. Ms. Baker, can you confirm that all military and other Federal helicopters flying in DCA class B airspace have these transponders turned on?

Ms. BAKER. Again, I am going to ask Mr. McIntosh to answer that question.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for that, ma'am. So you are correct. At the last Senate hearing, Acting Administrator Rocheleau did require that ADS–B Out be required for the military aircraft.

What came into question was the amount of waivers that were put in place to allow these aircraft to operate. The day of that hearing, we did go and review all the authorization and all those waivers, and the only waivers that are now permissible for an ADS–B Out off waiver are for aircraft doing active law enforcement, active national security, and VIP movement. Those are the only ones right now that are currently allowed. Any authorization that we had before is heavily scrutinized to ensure that that mandate is realized.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you.

As cochair of the Quiet Skies Caucus and the Member who represents the District of Columbia, which is plagued by airplane and helicopter noise, I am pleased we were able to get provisions to combat aviation noise included in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. Under this law, the FAA is required to do more to combat aviation noise and engage with the public on aviation noise.

Mr. Heibeck, what is the status of the implementation of the aviation noise provisions in the 2024 reauthorization law, especially the status of the Aircraft Noise Advisory Committee?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes, thank you for the question, Congresswoman.

Actually, the provision in the Reauthorization Act closely aligns with the robust community engagement program that is headed by our Office of National Engagement and Regional Administration. We have a regional administrator in the eastern region who is heavily engaged with the DCA noise roundtables here to address those issues.

I know that they are reporting information twice a year right now on the website regarding the noise complaints. Beyond that,

I would have to connect you or someone from your staff with the Office of National Engagement and Regional Administration.

Ms. NORTON. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Mr. Crawford for 5 minutes.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to talk about everybody's favorite topic: human resources.

As you are aware, our air traffic control centers have dealt with ongoing staffing shortages and retention challenges over the last decade. Mr. McIntosh, you know that very well. The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 helped by attempting to maximize the hiring of air traffic controllers, but I believe there is more that can be done to address that issue. Limited access to training programs and a lack of early career exposure are significant barriers to building a sustainable air traffic controller workforce.

What FAA policies and initiatives are either in place or could be created to expand training opportunities through universities, community colleges, technical schools, and even in high schools or vocational schools to address that issue?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question, sir. And first I want to thank everyone for the reauthorization bill, because it has allowed us to do maximum hiring.

Controller shortages—and I have a feeling I am going to be talking a lot about this today, but as a former controller and as a manager in an en route center and in my current position, staffing is really where it starts and ends as far as fixing a lot of our woes in the agency. Enough controllers to do the job is where it starts, and that is where we want to make sure that we keep the momentum that we have.

Under Secretary Duffy's leadership, as well as the Administrator, they have done a lot to incentivize the recruitment of controllers that you spoke to. We have supercharged hiring right now, which is shaving months off of the application process to get the best and the brightest into our FAA Academy.

We are also offering a 30-percent increase in salary for those academy candidates to make the job more appealing.

We are also providing incentives to facilities that are hard to staff, as well as incentives to keep controllers on board for longer, meaning the ones that are eligible to retire, we are offering them an additional 20 percent to stay on as we onboard the maximum hiring and to hire and train more controllers.

The CTI program, the Collegiate Training Initiative that we have in place, is something or another avenue that we are doing currently. The CTI program is great because it helps not just with our staffing shortages in our FAA facilities, but also at our Federal contract towers. Our Federal contract towers are now going to have that pipeline available to them.

But just recently, we did the Enhanced Collegiate Training Initiative. What that allows is for universities that qualify—and the qualification is if they can provide the same academia that the academy does over at Oklahoma City with the appropriate simulation training—those universities are accredited by the FAA, or basically say they pass the standards and they are validated, that they meet the same standards that a student who passed the acad-

emy gets, provided that those individuals that pass that Enhanced CTI and they pass the Air Traffic Skills Assessment and, of course, get through the medical and the security requirements that are required for all of our employees, instead of having to go to the academy, they go straight to an FAA field facility, which is going to enhance the pool.

Right now, we have 30. We have 5 schools that have been accepted for the Enhanced CTI, and we have 30 additional schools that are showing interest. We have just started this program, and we are expecting to see our first graduation of these candidates come out this spring. And I believe there were 40. That doesn't sound like a lot, but as this starts to turn over and we get more applicants, we could start talking about another 200 or 300 applicants that will be available for air traffic. And these are the things that we need to start leveraging to make sure we put the maximum amount of people into our field facilities so they become future air traffic controllers.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Let me ask you this. The military has a talent pipeline in the service academies and ROTC. What you are describing sounds an awful lot like it could be called, for lack of a better term, an air traffic controller corps. Is that something that you think has legs? I mean, identifying those young people as far back as high school, and putting them in that talent pipeline, and getting them ready to serve?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I definitely believe that is an option that we can take a look at.

I will be honest with you, I wasn't even interested in—or I didn't really know what an air traffic controller did in high school, nor did I in college. I actually learned about air traffic going into the military. I was in the U.S. Air Force. That is where I learned how to be an air traffic controller.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Historically, that is where you go.

Mr. MCINTOSH. That is correct. So, I do think that if there is a way that we can get more advertisement on what a great job and what a rewarding job an air traffic controller is and get people interested, I absolutely think that would be an option for us. Yes, sir.

Mr. CRAWFORD. Excellent, excellent. I appreciate that.

I am going to yield.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Nadler for 5 minutes.

Mr. NADLER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I think we can all agree that the situation at Newark Liberty International Airport is unacceptable. When radar screens go dark and controllers lose contact with planes, passenger safety is jeopardized and confidence in the FAA collapses.

We also learned yesterday that a critical hotline between military and civilian controllers at Reagan National Airport had not been functioning for over 3 years, contributing to serious near-misses.

Mr. McIntosh, what immediate steps is the FAA taking to fix the technology and data transmission failures disrupting operations in the Newark airspace, and how and when will these plans be communicated to stakeholders?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you.

In regards to Newark specifically, we are aware of how problematic the recent disruptions at the Philadelphia TRACON have been, and we have been actively working on stabilizing those operations. In fact, we have stabilized those operations. And the issues are a result of intermittent system outages that occurred with a telecom provider that was providing data in link to the facility. We have worked directly with that vendor, and we had a team of engineers at Philadelphia the very same week that that occurred. They identified and investigated what the outage was and provided the necessary mitigation to ensure that we have that system stability.

Secretary Duffy also visited the facility that same week. I actually was there. I had the pleasure of touring the facility along with him. And from that meeting, he took direct action. One of those actions is ensuring that we get a third line of redundancy from a telco provider to ensure that we have one more line of stability in case the first two go down, as well as hardening the system with a dedicated STARS line.

And then, of course, it also speaks to the larger infrastructure issue the FAA is having, which is looking at what our current telco requirements are, ensuring that we have better accessibility to fiber, getting out of this current copper connection thing that we have had for the last 40 to 50 years, and putting us on updated systems to make sure that our infrastructure is better suited to meet the NAS not just of today, but of the future.

In regards to DCA, the issue that we had with a DoD helicopter, we had a DoD helicopter come in for a landing. And the aircraft, for some reason, aborted that landing. I am not entirely sure what happened. As that aircraft departed the Pentagon without the necessary approach clearance from DCA, a call via that hotline did not occur.

Now, I know that we call that a hotline. What it is actually—it is probably better suited to say it is a switch or a button on a tablet that is in front of a controller where they just basically key up and it goes straight to DCA, and they can hear them either in the ear or a loudspeaker to say, I have got an aircraft on the go. That allows for immediate notification to the controllers at DCA to give a go-around to the necessary aircraft.

I want to say that the DCA controllers were fantastic in this event, because they had situational awareness of what was going on and gave those immediate go-arounds. But the issue really is making sure that that hotline is fixed, as well as ensuring that the helicopter pilot understands that they cannot enter Class Bravo airspace without the necessary coordination and approval of ATC. That did not occur that night, and we are working with the DoD right now to make sure that those problems are remedied. DoD is actually at FAA headquarters, I believe, today to work through that and make sure that we have a better pathway forward to ensure safety around DCA.

Mr. NADLER. Thank you.

Ms. Baker, section 363 of the FAA reauthorization requires substantial reforms to improve the safety of commercial air tours. Last month, we witnessed the latest preventable tragedy when a sightseeing helicopter crashed into the Hudson River, killing six people. In response, I introduced the bipartisan Improving Helicopter Safe-

ty Act to ban nonessential helicopter flights within a 20-mile radius of the Statue of Liberty. This is legislation I have been introducing for many years.

While the Reauthorization Act provides a multiyear window for formal rulemaking, the public cannot wait years for relief from the risks posed by these flights. In addition to grounding the company involved in the crash last month, what immediate steps is the FAA taking to protect public safety and mitigate the danger of nonessential air tour helicopters while the full implementation of section 363 proceeds?

And how will the FAA ensure that these long-overdue safety improvements are expedited to prevent further loss of life?

Ms. BAKER. Absolutely. Thanks for the question.

The accident in New York was tragic, and the videos of the accident are haunting. As you mentioned, the FAA immediately grounded the carrier, the operator of those air tours, and has done their own internal investigation into the performance of the operator. Additionally, the NTSB continues to investigate that particular accident.

What we are doing is we have gone through our evaluation of air tour operations. We have done additional surveillance where needed. Additionally, air tour operators are required to implement safety management systems and the advantage of safety management systems that allows for an air carrier—or an air tour operator, in this case—to immediately identify and mitigate risk far before the timeline of any rulemaking.

Mr. NADLER. What will it take for the FAA to ban nonessential flights around Manhattan, where there is no air traffic control, only visual control?

Ms. BAKER. I think that is——

Mr. NADLER [interrupting]. How many more accidents?

Ms. BAKER. I understand your concern.

Mr. NADLER. I asked a question.

Ms. BAKER. I understand your concern, and it is something we can talk about internal to the agency.

Mr. NADLER. Thank you, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I will now recognize myself for 5 minutes. Ms. Baker, the entire group, thank you for being here.

Section 310. Initially you talked a little bit about registration, and you are catching up on the backlog there. I want to talk a little bit about certification. Section 310 of the 2024 FAA reauthorization bill instructs the FAA to modernize the certification process, which will take years and cost tens of millions of dollars. I have been briefed by several stakeholders that the current system is not performing very well, and too many companies are delayed with their projects, and much of the work is administrative. We must ensure that a modern, streamlined type certification system will bring new aircraft to customers more quickly, which will reduce the regulatory burden on manufacturers while bringing safety improvements to market faster.

This is section 310, I am referencing 310 in our FAA reauthorization, and I would like you to provide me an update. But in this it said, "from the date of enactment," so this should have been done in November of 2024, that you had 180 days to conduct a review

and study to find an independent, nonprofit organization to look at type certification processes. Was that done in November 2024?

Ms. BAKER. We were a little late getting that done, but we did award a contract in January of 2025.

Mr. NEHLS. Okay. I would like to see it.

Then it also states in section 310 that no later than 18 months that this—you have 18 months, once the review and study has been done, you report back to Congress. So, that is due then in November of 2025. Do you think you will be able to meet that?

Ms. BAKER. Our intent is always to meet the timelines within——

Mr. NEHLS [interrupting]. Well——

Ms. BAKER [continuing]. The legislation.

Mr. NEHLS [continuing]. But you are a little late. I would like to see this. I am paying very close attention to this. This is ridiculous. We must get it done.

Ms. BAKER. We will be happy to follow up.

Mr. NEHLS. Supersonic aviation. January 2021, the FAA issued a final rule which generally upholds a prohibition—you can't—it is prohibiting civil supersonic flight over land in the United States. This took place back—it is a 1973 rule, 1973, which restricts civil aircraft from operating at speeds above Mach 1 over land in the United States unless a special flight authorization is received. At the time, the regulation was about protecting the public from disruptive sonic booms. Decades later, an unintended consequence of this uniform ban has stifled American innovation and aviation, and puts our country at a distinct disadvantage with our adversaries like China which are significantly developing in this space.

With that being said, it is evident that several U.S. aerospace companies have proven that they can safely fly above Mach 1 and not produce audible sonic booms that are heard at ground level. This is an example here. We have got Boom Supersonic. Have you ever heard of them?

Ms. BAKER. Yes.

Mr. NEHLS. Amazing, what they are doing. I mean, they have got this aircraft, Boom's demonstrator aircraft, the XB–1. It broke the sound barrier three times back in January of this year. They did it. They have been testing this thing. Broke the sound barrier three times without generating a sonic boom that reached the ground, demonstrating that quiet, supersonic travel is possible. I know some of the big commercial airliners—I think United has ordered some of these. They can get this done, but we got a problem with the FAA and the rulemaking, and it must change.

So that is section 1110. That was in the FAA reauthorization. And that, it said, Section 1110, Advancing Global Leadership on Civil Supersonic Aircraft. And all we were asking for in that FAA initial progress report no later than 1 year after the date of enactment, which is tomorrow. Where are we at with that report on supersonic? Because I haven't seen anything. Has anybody else seen anything on that?

Ms. BAKER. So the report—we have done some work around supersonic. One is around the idea of quiet booms. We are wrapping that up, as well as entering into an agreement with NASA to col-

laborate on what would be required to get sonic and hypersonic aircraft into the system.

Mr. NEHLS. Okay. But we said a year, and that is tomorrow. So can you tell me? Don't keep it secret. Let us know, because——

Ms. BAKER [interrupting]. We will be happy to follow up.

Mr. NEHLS. We are—yes, we need to follow up. We need to follow up. It is very, very important.

I filed a bill. I filed a bill. I introduced it yesterday, the Supersonic Aviation Modernization Act of 2025, with my colleague on the other side, Sharice Davids, and she is here.

Thank you for cosponsoring.

My bill would require the FAA administration to issue regulations permitting supersonic flight, provided that no sonic boom reaches the ground. We have got a company that demonstrated it, Boom Supersonic. I firmly believe that if we implement a noise-based approach for supersonic, it will align with the original intent protecting the public from noise disturbance while enabling a framework for innovation. U.S. manufacturers will be allowed to develop and test new supersonic aircraft, fostering a competitive market at a time when maintaining U.S. leadership in next-generation aerospace technology is critical.

So will you help me? Can I have a commitment from——

Ms. BAKER [interrupting]. It is exciting technology.

Mr. NEHLS. Very good. I yield. I now recognize Mr. Cohen for 5 minutes.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you, sir. We passed a great bill last year. Everybody agreed on it. Great leadership. Got it done. But implementation is what is important. And right now, the FAA is clearly not tracking what they were intended to do and what we expected to do as far as implementing the FAA bill.

I am disappointed today that the FAA Administrator is not here with us, Mr. Rocheleau. Secretary Duffy is not here, either. I would hope they would come at their earliest possible convenience, but they should be here today to tell us about how they are implementing this law. And it is an important law for America and for American safety.

We have talked some about the helicopter/plane crash. Mr. McIntosh, you gave some situations where you said they are still going to have access to that corridor, and you said for VIPs, is that correct?

Mr. MCINTOSH. For that corridor for VIPs. However, we still restrict mixed traffic and helicopters to be in that corridor at the same time.

Mr. COHEN. What do you mean, mixed traffic with helicopters?

Mr. MCINTOSH. So we do not—if they are in the corridor—if the helicopter is going through the corridor, then we hold aircraft out. If aircraft are going through the corridor, we hold the helicopter out. We do not allow both those aircraft in the corridor at the same time.

Mr. COHEN. You say you have got an exception for VIPs?

Mr. MCINTOSH. The VIP does not have to turn an ADS–B Out on for tracking purposes.

Mr. COHEN. And who are VIPs?

Mr. MCINTOSH. VIP is for Presidential movement.

Mr. COHEN. Don't you think they should be better protected than less protected, and not be in the corridor that has been this corridor that had 70-some-odd deaths or 60-some-odd deaths occur because of the failure of the DoD to keep their training helicopters out of that corridor, where there were takeoffs and landings? That is what caused the crash. The DoD had a training flight in that corridor when they could have done it after midnight. Shouldn't we immediately stop DoD from putting any flights in that corridor to protect lives of American citizens?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Sir, I can't comment on an NTSB investigation, but what I can say is that we keep that corridor safe by ensuring that we do not have mixed traffic in there, and it is rare exceptions when they are allowed to be.

Mr. COHEN. Were they allowed to be on the date of the crash?

Mr. MCINTOSH. We didn't have exceptions to the rule the day of the crash, sir.

Mr. COHEN. That needs to be straightened out. I mean, lives are at stake, and we have lost lives already. I would suggest you just get it done and eliminate the flights, but that is another issue.

Newark Airport. Mr. McIntosh, were there losses of communication, dead spots, during the previous administration, or is this something that just happened in the last few weeks?

Mr. MCINTOSH. In November, there was a loss of communications, and there was a momentary loss of surveillance. Yes, sir.

Mr. COHEN. Was that in Newark?

Mr. MCINTOSH. It was in the Philadelphia Area——

Mr. COHEN [interposing]. Right.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. C TRACON that handles the approach control services into Newark Airport.

Mr. COHEN. Why was that shifted from New York to Newark? I mean, New York didn't have a problem. And didn't Newark used to be controlled by the New York folk?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Actually, sir, the night of the November incident, there were issues at N90, which is the TRACON and New York Center. It was a major telecom issue.

Mr. COHEN. Okay. I would note—and I am not saying there is necessarily correlation—all the troubles began after Air Force One landed at—to take President Trump to Bedminster after it landed in Newark on that Friday evening on its way back from Rome. That is when the trouble started. I am not saying there is a correlation, just noting it. Thank you.

Ms. Baker, I was the author of the EVAC Act, along with Senator Duckworth. It required the FAA to ensure passengers could evacuate an aircraft in 90 seconds. The FAA did a test that was a joke. It was a fictionalized fantasy census of people no older than 60 and, I think, younger than 16. And they were all able-bodied, and they were probably Olympic sprinters. We need to have tests that are real, with people over 60, which is a lot of the fliers, and people under 16, and people with pets, and people with disabilities.

EVAC law is supposed to be conducted. The tests were supposed to be—or your study was supposed to be conducted by May 16. Why haven't they been conducted, and when will they be done?

Ms. BAKER. We are finishing up that report associated with that study.

Mr. COHEN. You are finishing it up? It is due tomorrow. Is it going to be finished by—is this an all-nighter?

Ms. BAKER. I am sorry, sir. Could you repeat that?

Mr. COHEN. Is this going to be an all-nighter? You are going to take some—whatever you take and get it done?

Ms. BAKER. We will do all due diligence to complete it properly.

Mr. COHEN. We will see what happens. But can you assure me that you are going to have real population censuses do those tests to see if an actual type of flight can evacuate in 90 seconds?

Ms. BAKER. We are definitely considering what was determined in the legislation: passengers with disabilities, passengers with service animals, passengers with communication challenges. All of those are being considered in the study.

Mr. COHEN. Thank you very much, and I see my time is up, and I yield.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Perry for 5 minutes.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Speaker—or Mr.——

Mr. NEHLS [interrupting]. Thank, you. Not yet, not yet.

Mr. PERRY. Mr. Chairman, thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, thanks for being here today and answering some questions for us, listening to our concerns.

I have been sounding the alarm for years about the failures of the current system. It has taken collisions, literal collisions, close calls, and other incidents to bring that all to light, and I think we need to absolutely—I have been here for a while, and we have been talking about it, but nothing really changes much. And I am concerned that the current proposal on the table will just throw a bunch of money at it, as we usually do around here, and fail to fix the underlying problem.

Mr. Collins, your testimony highlights the critical concerns about ATC. In September of last year, we reported that 76 percent of the FAA's 138 air traffic control systems were unsustainable or potentially unsustainable. And we also know that the FAA has been very slow to modernize these systems; on average, taking a decade to modernize them, sometimes up to 12 years to do that. The same report of 2024 found that of the 105 unsustainable or potentially unsustainable systems identified by GAO, 58 have critical operational impacts on the safety and efficiency of the national airspace. In response, the FAA technician identified system obsolescence or difficulty in finding replacement parts.

Ladies and gentleman, this is antique stuff. That is why they can't get the replacement parts, because it is not made anymore because it is that old.

Now, during the last reauthorization, I offered an amendment to transfer some of the operation of ATC to a separate, not-for-profit corporate entity. And I know some people in the room here don't like that, and I am willing to explore some other operations. But first of all, FAA should not oversee itself. It is against ICAO and NTSB recommendations. And no one is ever held accountable for these continual failures. And a nonprofit system would get rid of all this oppressive redtape and funding uncertainty.

Look, like I said, you might not like that idea, but it absolutely must be addressed, and we've got to find a different model. We

can't continue with the model that delivers obsolete equipment that's already 10 years late. I mean, that just doesn't work.

I would like to submit, Mr. Chairman, for the record, the May 9, 2025, Wall Street Journal op-ed entitled, "Time Is Running Out for the U.S. Air-Traffic Control System" by Robert Poole, requesting a change to the business model.

Mr. NEHLS. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

Op-ed entitled, "Time Is Running Out for the U.S. Air-Traffic Control System," by Robert Poole, Wall Street Journal, May 9, 2025, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Scott Perry

TIME IS RUNNING OUT FOR THE U.S. AIR-TRAFFIC CONTROL SYSTEM

Ensuring safety requires bringing both technology and the business model into the 21st century.

by Robert Poole

Wall Street Journal, May 9, 2025
https://www.wsj.com/opinion/time-is-running-out-for-the-u-s-air-traffic-control-system-142ef9b2

Surrounded by airline CEOs and other aviation executives, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy on Thursday announced his plan to bring about a new air-traffic control system over the next three to four years. He's asking Congress to provide billions of dollars—though he didn't specify the total amount—to pay for it.

America's ATC system needs repairing. Most of the technology listed in Mr. Duffy's plan should be replaced. But shoveling billions into a failed procurement system won't fix the problem. Our ATC system lags behind those of other countries in many respects, including in technological advancement and productivity.

The Federal Aviation Administration's budget for facilities and equipment—a substantial portion of which goes to air-traffic control—has stayed roughly flat in nominal terms over the past decade, while the operations budget has soared. The 21 high-altitude air route traffic control centers, more than 100 approach control centers, and many hundreds of airport control towers are antiquated, and most need to be replaced.

But with today's digital surveillance technology, air traffic in our skies can be managed from almost anywhere. We need perhaps three rather than 21 high-altitude centers. One would do the trick, in fact, but three would ensure backup options in case of failure. This large-scale consolidation should be financed by long-term revenue bonds based on ATC user fees, which are paid by airlines and other airspace users to the ATC service provider. A pipe dream? Australia, Germany, South Africa and the U.K. have all done such consolidations in recent decades.

A single digital remote tower can manage many smaller control towers, at lower cost and higher productivity. While these systems are expanding throughout Europe, the FAA has resisted this breakthrough innovation.

America's ATC system employs a significant amount of outdated technology for which no replacement parts exist, partly because the FAA often waits until a unit fails before trying to repair or replace it. Well-managed, well-funded ATC systems in Australia, Canada, Germany and the U.K. are able to plan large-scale technology replacements before systems begin breaking down. Many ATC providers buy replacement systems in bulk and roll them out to all facilities over a year or two. By contrast, the FAA in some cases takes 10 to 15 years to install replacement systems, by which time the systems may already be obsolete.

These are only a few examples of how badly funded and poorly managed America's ATC system is. A one-time multibillion-dollar infusion won't fix a broken procurement process. It could also undermine the modernization effort by botching the procurement of new systems. A much wiser policy would be to replace the business model.

The reason many other countries' ATC systems work far better than ours is that their business models have changed, from a tax-funded bureaucracy embedded in a transportation ministry into a public utility funded by customer user fees. Such a model enables the board and top management of the utility to do long-range planning and to finance both technology upgrades and facility consolidations based on

a predictable revenue stream. This also changes airlines and airspace users from supplicants before Congress to stakeholder customers demanding high-caliber performance.

Several ATC public-utility models are in operation around the world. The most common model is a government-owned public utility, as in Australia, New Zealand, Germany and much of the rest of Europe. America's Tennessee Valley Authority is an analogous example, funded by customers' electric bills and financed via long-term revenue bonds. Italy and the U.K. provide air-traffic control via public-private partnerships—partly state-owned and partly investor-owned companies. The highly successful Nav Canada, the world's second-largest ATC provider in terms of annual transactions, uses a nonprofit user cooperative model.

How out of step is the U.S.? The latest figures from the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization find that there are four nongovernment providers, 63 government-owned utilities and four intergovernmental ATC utilities serving multiple countries in Africa, Central America, and Northern Europe. Adding them all up, 98 countries today have ATC services via user-funded public utilities.

Nearly all countries served by ATC companies have also separated the provision of ATC services from aviation safety regulation. The National Transportation Safety Board, as well as many former FAA and Transportation Department officials, have called for such separation in the U.S. This has been the policy of the International Civil Aviation Organization since 2001, and the U.S. is one of the few outliers. An initial reform step would be to separate our Air Traffic Organization from the FAA, at last putting the two at arm's length.

On June 5, 2017, President Trump held an event in support of House Transportation Committee Chairman Bill Shuster's ATC corporation bill, which proposed a nonprofit public utility similar to Nav Canada. He later focused on other infrastructure reforms, and that bill failed. Today, the best champion of ATC reform is Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, chairman of the Commerce Committee.

During the first Trump term, many airline executives supported this kind of reform; today, they seem to favor a one-time infusion of tax money. But the ATC system's dire shape is far more visible today than it was in 2017. It took a tragic midair collision between two airliners over the Grand Canyon in 1956 to bring about nationwide radar surveillance of air traffic. Let's hope that only one 2025 midair collision suffices to bring about meaningful ATC reform.

Mr. PERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Another recommendation by Mr. Poole is for the FAA to embrace remote digital towers. It has become the norm abroad, and it maximizes the productivity of air traffic controllers in the system. It was invented and first tested by the FAA in 2007. Unfortunately, the FAA just ignored it while other countries have capitalized on our findings, providing significant technological advances for controllers, but it also allows for facility consolidation and improvements, which saves money.

Mr. McIntosh, how many controllers does the FAA expect to retire in the next 5 years, and how is that going to help staffing shortfall among controllers?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I don't have the exact number of how many retirees we are forecasting this year or for the next 2 years. I can definitely get—and circle back with you with——

Mr. PERRY [interposing]. Okay.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. That number. But I can tell you that right now, we have over 3,100 trainees in the pipeline. We are going to hire 2,000 candidates this year with——

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. I know, I have heard that, and that is great. But right now——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interrupting]. I want to talk about the attrition——

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. We've got problems across the whole——

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. I think that is what you are getting at, right?

Mr. PERRY [continuing]. Enterprise. Well, the other part of the solution to the problem is providing exemption waivers to allow experienced controllers to stay on the job. Secretary Duffy has included this in his plan. I offered an amendment in the last authorization to increase the mandatory retirement age, but unfortunately, it was rejected. And I would just like your thoughts on that.

I mean, these are people like yourself that are experienced, they are here now, they are able to do the job now, but we kick them out regardless of whether they want to do the job and can do the job, and then complain about the shortages across the system. So, what are your feelings about that at this moment?

Mr. MCINTOSH. My feeling is that right now, the age 56 requirement is congressionally mandated. And if that is changed——

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. I know it is congressionally mandated. I am asking for your feelings on it, based on the shortage of controllers that we constantly complain about and this being a viable solution. I want your opinion, not Congress' opinion.

Mr. MCINTOSH. My opinion would be we should be examining every option that we have available to us, and see what——

Mr. PERRY [interrupting]. Of course we should, sir. Do you not have an opinion that—you are brought here as a subject matter expert. Pick a side, sir.

Mr. MCINTOSH. My side is that I would like to see us do everything that is possible.

To your point, the amount of people that are going to turn 56 for the next 1 to 2 years, I would like to know what that number is to see what kind of a difference it would make.

Mr. PERRY. All right, Mr. Chairman, that is not much of an answer, and there are a lot of people that are beyond the age of 56 that are perfectly capable of doing jobs, and I think we ought to consider that highly.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. NEHLS. A valid point, Mr. Perry.

I now recognize Mr. Johnson for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the witnesses for your testimony today.

When we passed the FAA Reauthorization Act last year, the message was clear: the safety of the American people is nonnegotiable. But here we are, just a year later, and I am deeply disturbed by what we have seen. In a matter of months, roughly 2,000 employees were pushed out of the FAA under co-President Musk's "fork in the road" campaign, a campaign driven by confusion, coercion, and fear through vague emails, misleading buyout offers, and a chilling five-bullet ultimatum. Workers were left unsure whether silence meant resignation, all in the name of efficiency. That's like gutting your fire department during wildfire season and calling it innovation.

Mr. McIntosh, how many air traffic controllers were driven out by co-President Musk and DOGE?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I will speak to——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. I am—just a question: How many were driven out by co-President Musk and DOGE?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I am going to answer the question on how many were driven out, sir. I don't know what the second part means.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Well, how many were driven out?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Zero.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Zero? So these employees all received the buyout offer, correct? The air traffic controllers.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Our air traffic controllers——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. They received the buyout——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interrupting]. Our air traffic controllers——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [continuing]. Offer, correct? Isn't that correct?

Mr. MCINTOSH. No, sir, it isn't. Our critically—what we deemed as critical——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Sir, are you here to testify today that the air traffic controllers did not receive the buyout offer from co-President Musk?

Mr. MCINTOSH. What I am going to say is that——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Is that true or is it false?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I would like to answer the question, sir——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. That they received——

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. If that is okay.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Did they receive the buyout offer?

Mr. MCINTOSH. 2152s, which are air traffic controllers, are exempt from——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Did they receive the buyout offer? is my question.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I am not aware if they received any. You asked me if they were driven out, and the answer——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. No, I am asking you, did they receive the buyout offer?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I am not aware if they received a buyout offer——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Are you aware of it, Ms. Baker? Did air traffic controllers receive the buyout offer?

Ms. BAKER. I am unaware of if they received——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. You are unaware of it?

Ms. BAKER. No.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Okay. And what about the five-bullet ultimatum email? Did they receive that, Mr. McIntosh?

Mr. MCINTOSH. There is—we do a "what did we do for the week," five bullets. And yes, we all do that.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. You did receive that memo, right?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I did receive that memo.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. The air traffic controllers also did. Correct?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, they did.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. And that created some confusion, some fear among an already overworked staff of air traffic controllers, I would assume.

We are talking about people who work 10 hours a day, 6 days a week for years at a time. Isn't that right, Mr. McIntosh?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Depending on which facility, that is true.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. And if they did receive the buyout offer, that would have incentivized them, who are already ex-

hausted and suffering burnout, that would have encouraged more people to accept the offer and leave air traffic control. Correct?

Mr. MCINTOSH. 2152s are exempt from that buyout, sir.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Okay. Well, let me ask you this. How many air traffic controllers have left the system since January 20th of 2025?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I am not aware of how many have retired since that time.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. No, no, but—so could it have been 100?

Mr. MCINTOSH. It could have been one. It could have been 1,000.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. It could have been 5,000.

Mr. MCINTOSH. No.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Maybe 2,500?

Mr. MCINTOSH. No.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. 2,000.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I don't believe so, sir. I track how many air traffic controllers are——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. Well, tell us how many have left their jobs since January 20.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I can't tell you that exact number, sir——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. You won't tell us that.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I would be happy to come back to you——

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA [interrupting]. I will move on.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. Mr. Collins, Secretary Duffy recently outlined a major plan to modernize air traffic control systems and replace outdated FAA towers and facilities. Can you discuss the steps that FAA is taking to make sure that these upgrades don't cause more disruptions?

Mr. COLLINS. So, we currently don't have any ongoing work related to the new plan. We would be happy to chat with your staff about any work that you might want us to do in that area.

Mr. JOHNSON OF GEORGIA. All right. Well, it looks like there is going to be something rolled out by July of 2026, according to testimony earlier today. I am perplexed that you are not already getting ready for that.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman's time has expired. I now recognize Mr. Babin for 5 minutes.

Dr. BABIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate it, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. McIntosh——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interposing]. Yes, sir.

Dr. BABIN [continuing]. Section 630 of the FAA Reauthorization Act authorized annual appropriations of $10 million to modernize air traffic control systems to better integrate space launch and reentry operations. I continue to hear that these programs are being deprioritized and delayed by the FAA, despite their many benefits to airspace management. Can you tell me what the status is of FAA programs to enable real-time hazard area generation and dynamic airspace management?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir. I would love to, and thank you for the question.

Dr. BABIN. Yes, sir.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Commercial space has made significant progress in the United States over the last few years. We are seeing much more commercial space launches this year than we have seen 4 or 5 years ago. As a matter of fact, it is not uncommon for us to see two, three, four a week——

Dr. BABIN [interposing]. Absolutely.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. With the advancements that have been made.

And to the question that you have asked, the FAA has made a lot of progress in respect to the tools that facilitate that increased cadence of the space launches. And what we aim to do is keep the flying public safe while not disrupting the passenger flights that have to be a part of the National Airspace System.

We have deployed successfully what we call the Space Data Integrator, SDI. That makes for a better tool to share telemetry data. When we have a commercial space launch, it is very important, obviously, to see where the space launch is and make sure we keep nonparticipating aircraft.

Real-time telemetry is important, because the better the information, the more accurate we are with making sure that we keep flights clear.

We also have something that we just developed called a range risk analysis tool. That has been improved, and it determines calculations on how large a debris response area is. So in the case of an anomaly, we know exactly how long to clear the airspace, how wide, and for how long. And that is very important because as soon as the debris may come down, we can start resuming those operations.

These improved processes, along with those enhanced tools, will definitely lessen the negative impact of space launches and also the impacts to commercial flight operations. And we are on track on meeting that December 2026 deadline, sir.

Dr. BABIN. I am very glad to hear that.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir.

Dr. BABIN. I would like to follow up and give Ms. Baker an opportunity to provide her perspectives on this same question.

Did you hear the question, Ms. Baker?

Ms. BAKER. Would you mind repeating it, please?

Dr. BABIN. Sure. No, ma'am. Can you tell me what the status is of FAA programs to enable real-time hazard area generation and dynamic airspace management?

Ms. BAKER. We rely heavily on Air Traffic and our colleagues in AST to implement those programs. So, I have nothing to add to what Mr. McIntosh shared.

Dr. BABIN. Okay, okay. Mr. Collins, section 1003 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 directed GAO to conduct an assessment of how FAA allocates its RDT&E funding. And in 2018, Congress mandated that at least 70 percent of RDT&E funds must be directed toward safety-related initiatives. What is the status of this report?

Mr. COLLINS. That report should be coming out in the next month or so and will be made publicly available.

Dr. BABIN. Do you have any preliminary results that you can share with the committee about that?

Mr. COLLINS. We have provided preliminary results to the authorizing committee staff, but aren't ready to make them public at this time.

Dr. BABIN. Oh, okay. Would your office commit to adhering to any funding level that you come up with with us?

Mr. COLLINS. We would be happy——

Dr. BABIN [interrupting]. Do you have a funding level?

Mr. COLLINS. We would be happy to work with your staff on any additional issues that you have related to that topic.

Dr. BABIN. Okay. Mr. Chairman, I think that is—I will yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Ms. Brownley for 5 minutes.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Baker, my question is to you. The 2024 reauthorization finally provided badly needed oversight of aircraft maintenance performed at foreign maintenance facilities, including reporting on defects in work performed at these facilities when aircraft are returned to be flown in this country by U.S. air carriers. The reauthorization required FAA actions. Can you provide an update on where FAA is with regard to implementing these requirements?

Ms. BAKER. I would love to, thank you.

So, we did finish up the rule that required drug and alcohol testing for employees of foreign repair stations. So, that is complete and in the process of being implemented.

The additional requirements are to require employees of foreign repair stations to meet the equivalent of part 65, which are the FAA certification requirements for mechanics, particularly those who return aircraft to service or those who supervise others who are doing the work. We are looking into that, on how we can implement those processes.

Additionally, we have the requirement to not accept future foreign repair stations from countries that don't meet ICAO standards, so we are looking to implement that, as well.

And finally, we are working around the increased inspections and unannounced inspections, what we would do there.

It is important to note we do ongoing surveillance of foreign repair stations. We don't want repair stations, whether foreign or domestic, to introduce additional risk into the system. So they are already privy to a routine surveillance program. And as risks present, we will be sure to go in and take a closer look.

You also asked specifically about the air carrier reporting. We are building the data collection tools so air carriers can report that information to us, and we can conduct analysis on what they submit.

Ms. BROWNLEY. And when——

Ms. BAKER [interrupting]. That feeds back into the risk model.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Do you have a timeline for when all of this will be complete?

Ms. BAKER. I don't, but that is something we could get back with you on.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Okay, great. So a followup question then is, once FAA has fully implemented these requirements, if FAA notices that an airline—or multiple airlines, for that matter—making use of the

same facility, reporting substantial failures affecting the safe operation of aircraft returning to service, what steps would FAA take to remedy that problem?

And will FAA commit to using this new data to aggressively act where these issues are found?

Ms. BAKER. So absolutely, we use data to manage risk. That is what safety management is for. If we saw trends that needed attention, we would definitely do attention there, and exercise our compliance and enforcement program.

We want participants in the system to comply. We want them to not introduce risk. And our goal is to make sure that isn't happening.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Thank you.

Mr. Heibeck, the Inflation Reduction Act included resources for projects relating to the production, transportation, blending, or storage of sustainable aviation fuel. What progress is FAA making on helping to ensure that airports are able to deliver sustainable aviation fuel to meet the demands that air carriers have for this fuel?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes. So I believe there have been several—I don't have the specific numbers, but I believe there have been several grants issued. That includes sustainable aviation fuel storage with them, but I can circle back to you—with your staff or you—and confirm that.

Ms. BROWNLEY. So on these grants, do you have any idea how much FAA has allocated and what progress has taken place?

And can we expect a full utilization of the remaining funds?

Mr. HEIBECK. I don't have that information with me. I can circle back and provide you with that information.

Ms. BROWNLEY. Okay. Ms. Baker or Mr. McIntosh, as FAA considers improvements to air traffic control systems, is FAA also looking at software that aircraft need to have on board, such as modern technology that alerts pilots in the cockpit to issues like lining up to land or take off from the wrong runway?

Ms. BAKER. So, yes, we are. We did task our Investigative Technologies ARC to look at in-cockpit technologies around runways. They did provide us a recommendation late last year—late last summer, I believe—and we are looking to see what it would take to implement that.

Ms. BROWNLEY. It seems to me like this is low-hanging fruit in some sense, relative to safety of our skies, and I have had many people come into my office to talk about the technologies that they have, and it is out there, it is ready. It is a matter of FAA requiring the airlines to begin to start implementing this in their plane. So, thank you.

With that, time is up, and I will yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Mr. LaMalfa for 5 minutes.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ready, Mr. Heibeck?

Mr. HEIBECK. Good morning.

Mr. LAMALFA. Good morning. All right. I have been a Member of this U.S. House for 12 years, 132 days, and this morning. So this issue I am going to talk to you about has been an issue for 12

years, 132 days, and this morning, at least. That is putting an FAA-mandated fence around the Tulelake Municipal Airport which lies in the town of Newell, not far from the area called Tulelake, right on the California-Oregon border.

[Poster displayed.]

Mr. LAMALFA. So, the airport is right here. That is the perimeter of that. One of the contentions is that there is an issue with the national park monument nearby. So the 37 acres that are proximate but not even adjacent to the airport are highlighted in this magenta color here, right? So that is 37 acres that is not even adjacent to the airport.

So FAA has been mandating all this time that there should be a fence for safety around there to keep people from wandering in, or deer or elk, maybe livestock, what have you, which is a good idea. But there has been just one holdup after another to getting this job done.

So Mr. Heibeck, I just want to ask you straight up, because it has been really aggravating to me, and I have been holding my tongue for a long time, allowing some sort of process, as it is, to work. Is this an acceptable timeline for something FAA is mandating of the locals there for a very important facility for agriculture and the crop dusting aspects of that, as well as other municipal airport needs?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes. Thank you for your question, Congressman.

To answer directly, no, it is not acceptable. In my experience with environmental reviews and section 106 consultation processes, it has been my experience that sometimes we wait far too long before elevating issues to be resolved when there is disagreement amongst the parties. And I think some of that comes into play here.

But I——

Mr. LAMALFA [interrupting]. What does "elevating issues" mean in the sense——

Mr. HEIBECK [interrupting]. "Elevating issues" means that, if you can't come to an agreement with a consulting party in the process or with another agency in the environmental review, that you would elevate it up to another higher level. And I say that, sir, because I am acutely aware of this issue. I am tracking it. And as of this morning, I understand that we have an agreement on the MOA with the county. I also understand that there is agreement on the visitation plan, that all the language has been worked out there.

And now we have the——

Mr. LAMALFA [interrupting]. So do you stand behind that? Because if I asked Modoc County about this, is the agreement in place, they will say, yes, we have worked with them and it is in place?

Mr. HEIBECK. The——

Mr. LAMALFA [interrupting]. Will I get that answer from Modoc County?

Mr. HEIBECK. The agreement is not yet in place. The agreement has now—once we have the second piece of it, the monitoring plan to monitor for when they are—to monitor, they will—those pieces will need to go back to——

Mr. LAMALFA [interrupting]. You mean monitoring while the fence is being installed, looking for stuff on the ground?

Mr. HEIBECK. No, I think it is monitoring of the visitors coming on to the airport, sir.

So the MOA contains two appendices. That second appendix for the monitoring plan needs to—my understanding is the county will have some requested edits back to us by Friday. After that, I expect next week the entire MOA with the appendices will move to the State Historic Preservation Office for review.

Mr. LAMALFA. Well, I can point to much of the delay came from these so-called consensus building meetings run by a group called the Udall Foundation. They were seeking funding a couple of years ago in one of my other committees. They forced Modoc County to go through, at tremendous cost to the taxpayer, all these meetings and meetings to build some kind of consensus. The consensus never happened. Lawsuits were still filed by a group that thinks that they need to take the airport out and turn it back into the internment camp that it was during the war.

So the interesting thing is that the 37 acres that is set aside as a park right here has had nothing done to it as a park. It has got a couple ruins on it, and the whole rest of the field area has nothing in it. There used to be those internment camp huts there [indicating area on poster]. After the war, many of those were purchased by locals, and the locals used them as homes. So we are talking about an issue that is really a manufactured one by outsiders agitating from getting a blankety-blank fence built for 12-plus years.

I mean, isn't that kind of embarrassing after a point, sir?

Mr. HEIBECK. I do understand your frustration, Congressman.

Mr. LAMALFA. No, but is it embarrassing to you all?

Mr. HEIBECK. I—it certainly—I think we could do better, and that is what I was referring to when I said about elevating this issue. It would have been, in my view, better to elevate it sooner to get this resolved.

Mr. LAMALFA. Okay, so since we are elevated now, what kind of timeline are we looking at to work out the monitoring, the access?

I don't know what there is to visit out there. It is a runway and an open field with a broken-down fence from the past. There is nothing to see there.

But that all said, and what I would love, too, is if they did want to turn this park into something that could be visited, and refurbish it into something that would be a replica of a sorry past that was there, I would be all for that on the 37 acres. But nobody has moved forward to do that. The national parks hasn't, the monument people haven't, and the people interested in that haven't.

Let's look at the next slide.

[Poster displayed.]

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you.

Mr. LAMALFA. Okay, so we have here——

Mr. NEHLS [interrupting]. The gentleman's time——

Mr. LAMALFA [continuing]. This is the perimeter fence that needs to be done. And so let's get it done, please. Okay?

Mr. HEIBECK. You have my commitment——

Mr. LAMALFA [interrupting]. It doesn't [inaudible]——

Mr. HEIBECK [continuing]. To see this through, sir.

Mr. LAMALFA [continuing]. At all, at all.

Mr. HEIBECK. You have my commitment.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman's time has expired. Mr. Carbajal, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome to all the witnesses. You guys have a tough job, and a very sensitive and important job, and that is why you are being grilled today. So, I really appreciate your work.

My understanding is that the air traffic controllers were spared from DOGE's indiscriminate purge of FAA employees. However, in meetings with my constituents, they have informed me that other key safety roles within the FAA's Air Traffic Organization, ATO, were terminated, which has negatively impacted their job.

Mr. McIntosh, can you discuss the logic and impact of the mass firings in the FAA by DOGE?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I am sorry, Congressman, I am trying to understand your question. Can you repeat it one more——

Mr. CARBAJAL [interrupting]. Aside from air traffic controllers, there were many others in the FAA that were terminated by DOGE in various positions. What was the impact and the logic that you are aware of those firings?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Honestly, Congressman, I am not aware of employees fired by DOGE in the air traffic——

Mr. CARBAJAL [interrupting]. You have got to be kidding me.

Mr. MCINTOSH. No, sir.

Mr. CARBAJAL. I am appalled that you would respond in such a way when there is evidence and record that so many were let go. Not controllers, but so many supportive staff.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I understand, sir. I am not trying to be standoffish with you. I am not aware of anyone terminated or fired by DOGE.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Okay. Well, I would like you to go back and look at that. And if you find that there is contrary information to that knowledge you have, that you get back to me.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir. Of course.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Mr. Heibeck, an issue I hear consistently from my constituents deals with airport and spacecraft noise pollution. As members of this committee, we work towards solutions. Can you provide an update on the implementation of section 786, which requires the FAA to update its noise standards?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes. So, that section requires us to update our part 150 regulations regarding noise compatibility. We are in the process of updating them for changes in other regulations and laws that are referenced in there.

A piece of what will be required is results from the ongoing noise study that we will need to finalize our update, so I don't think we are going to make the timeline to update that because this is an ongoing study. It has been going on for some time with significant input through the comment period. I think we did two notices and received over 8,000 comments to look at regarding——

Mr. CARBAJAL [interrupting]. What is the new timeline?

Mr. HEIBECK. I don't have a specific when that will wrap up.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Any general timeline?

Mr. HEIBECK. As part of the reauthorization, another piece was also added to that, and that is the Aircraft Noise Advisory Committee that we are required to establish. That charter has been—or is being finalized, sorry, and then we will solicit members for all of that—a culmination of all the information that comes in from there. So I don't know how long it is going to take for the committee to do its work, either, so I don't have a——

Mr. CARBAJAL [interrupting]. I would appreciate you getting back to me as to an estimated timeline.

Mr. HEIBECK. Absolutely.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

Ms. Baker, aviation products and operators compete in a global marketplace, but safety is a shared mutual goal of aviation authorities, manufacturers, operators, and the traveling public. The recent FAA reauthorization included provisions aimed at bolstering the FAA's engagement in the international marketplace with the goal of better utilizing safety resources and facilitating market access for the U.S. aviation products. Can you provide an update as to where the agency is implementing these provisions?

And can you also discuss how efforts to enhance FAA's international engagement and how to better leverage bilateral safety agreements will benefit safety and aviation growth?

Ms. BAKER. Thank you for the question.

So we recognize that aviation is global and aviation safety is global. We do have arrangements, as you described. We have international safety agreements, bilateral agreements that allow us to leverage each other's inspection workforce, for example, which makes all of us more efficient. It also generates more data that we can share.

We have validation agreements so we don't have to go through a full certification project of an aircraft that has been certified already by the home authority. So that allows us to integrate products more quickly, and allows our products to also be integrated more quickly overseas.

Additionally, we are looking at how we can share data internationally. We have an effort we call the Global Safety—GSIME. Never use an acronym you can't define. But the concept of GSIME is that other foreign civil aviation authorities are also gathering data on aviation operations within their country, whether it is their local operations or it is operations of U.S. operators coming into those countries and how can we link those data sources together so collectively we can get a fuller picture of what is happening worldwide.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you.

I am out of time, but I will submit my last question for Mr. McIntosh and Mr. Heibeck. If I could get an answer to those questions later, I would appreciate it.

Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Owens for 5 minutes.

Mr. OWENS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 is a strong bipartisan step forward when it demonstrated what Congress can accomplish when we work together to improve American aviation. A year later, many

good parts of the FAA reauthorization are already being felt in many airports, large and small. We are seeing it in my great State of Utah as we continue to expand our Salt Lake City Airport. It is among the Nation's newest, most innovative, and fast-growing travel hubs.

At the same time, our regional airports continue to be vital links for our rural communities to the economic opportunities, essential services. That being said, it is essential, with our growth, that we are addressing workforce strategies, employing safety systems, and modernizing our systems with new technology.

Mr. Collins, section 414 of the reauthorization directs the GAO to initiate a study to assess high school aviation maintenance technology programs and identify barriers for graduates to obtain this training and expertise needed to become FAA-certified mechanics. Has the GAO initiated this study yet?

Mr. COLLINS. That study was initiated last month.

Mr. OWENS. It has been?

Mr. COLLINS. Yes. We have just started work.

Mr. OWENS. Okay. Has it—so it has—when do you expect it to be completed?

Mr. COLLINS. They are just now scoping out that engagement, so I can't give you an anticipated issuance date, but happy to get back to you——

Mr. OWENS [interposing]. Okay.

Mr. COLLINS [continuing]. As they progress in their work.

Mr. OWENS. Are there any updates you can share right now with the committee regarding this?

Mr. COLLINS. It's just in its initial stages.

Mr. OWENS. Okay. All right, sounds good.

Mr. McIntosh, the section 415 of the reauthorization provides for improved access to air traffic control simulation trainings, specifically the tower simulator studies, while maintaining high training standards. How far along is the FAA in acquiring, deploying, and implementing these simulation systems at our towers now?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question, and I am happy to provide an update on this.

Tower simulation systems are something that is vital for our success. As we train more air traffic controllers, these tower simulations give us high-fidelity problems to give us realistic scenarios. And we thank everyone in the room for the funding to allow us to do this.

In regards to where we are now, we have 56 tower simulators that have been put into our FAA facilities, and most recently Newark. And the responses we have gotten from the controllers and the management team is that it is fantastic, it is high fidelity, it is a—it has got a visual database where you look out on the platform. It looks like the tower, it looks like the airport service environment, and we can practice all of our normal operations and our regular operations. That is where we want our controllers to be, are in those simulators.

As a former controller, these things offered me so much time to learn irregular operations. A pilot would never practice an engine flame-out or a bird strike without having to be able to do it in a simulator. We want to do the same thing with our air traffic con-

trollers. So having the ability to do this, we are so excited about it.

Mr. OWENS. Okay.

Mr. MCINTOSH. We currently have 56. We are on pace to make sure that we meet the authorization bill that every tower has access to a tower simulator. So thank you for the question. We appreciate the funding. We are right where we need to be with this.

Mr. OWENS. Okay, thank you so much.

I am going to yield the remainder of my time to my friend from California, Mr. LaMalfa.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you, Mr. Owens. I greatly appreciate your graciousness there. 5 minutes flies by so.

[Poster displayed.]

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Heibeck, we are going to come back to the situation here. Now, adjacent—or nearby the Tulelake Airport was the Tule Lake National Monument, that 37 acres in magenta, that L-shaped area. They managed to build a fence practically overnight. See that fence right here, around that, around that open, empty field, basically? That is what they managed to do in no time, yet the section 106 process that the airport is being put through over a long time with a lot of people at the table has taken the 12 years, 132 days that I am talking about, basically, to get there.

[Poster displayed.]

Mr. LAMALFA. So—and then on the next one, let's see. Let's see, these are some of the things that are left behind. These are some of the ruins that we are talking about that we are basing the whole situation on of preservation.

And so the 37 acres, I am happy to have that turned into a park, and they can do what they need to do there. The airport needs to get done. Can you assure me that the section 106 process will be finished soon, and the airport fence construction can be completed timely for the safety of the airport?

Mr. HEIBECK. Again, Congressman, I share your frustration with this. You have my commitment to conclude this process as soon as possible.

Mr. LAMALFA. Thank you.

I yield back. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Stanton for 5 minutes.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for the witnesses for being here today.

The United States does remain the gold standard of aviation safety, but recent incidents like the tragic crash above the Potomac earlier this year and a series of near-misses nationwide understandably put people's teeth on edge.

Just in the last few weeks, Newark Airport, one of the busiest airports in the Nation, experienced a series of equipment outages. These disruptions delayed and canceled flights, and thank God, no one got hurt. Notably, these incidents happened on top of ongoing air traffic controller shortages. What is even more alarming is that these problems aren't limited to Newark. Airports across the country have struggled with these shortages for decades.

And look, I am not going to agree with this administration very often, but Secretary Duffy's new plan to strengthen our air traffic

control infrastructure deserves our serious bipartisan consideration, because on this most critical issue, we have to work together, and I am confident we will.

Last year, this committee came together, Republicans and Democrats, to pass a strong FAA reauthorization bill. I was proud to help get it across the finish line. And we gave the FAA clear marching orders: hire more air traffic controllers, modernize outdated technology, replace systems that are unsafe or unstable. That work is underway, but the FAA needs to move faster to implement this bill. It was a big deal to get this major legislation across the finish line.

In the meantime, we in Congress, we can do more. Just last week, I was proud to introduce the Air Traffic Control Workforce Development Act with my Republican colleague, Congressman Begich of Alaska. Our bipartisan bill directly tackles the controller shortage by training new recruits and keeping experienced controllers on the job, including providing more support for mental health challenges.

We are ready to move. I want to get this bill passed and signed into law as soon as possible. Back home in Arizona, we would benefit from a swift implementation of the FAA. I advocated for a provision in last year's reauthorization to launch a pilot program converting high-activity contract towers into FAA staff towers. That program is now law, and Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport is a perfect candidate to lead the way.

We didn't leave this open-ended. We gave FAA a clear deadline—18 months—to get the pilot program off the ground. When Administrator Whitaker testified here last September, he said the agency was on track to meet that timeline. Mr. McIntosh, is that still true? Where does implementation stand?

And will the FAA hold listening sessions or public meetings so local communities can weigh in?

Mr. MCINTOSH. First, I would like to thank you for calling us the gold standard. That is something that we take seriously and to heart every single day. Every single controller and manager and technician wear that on their sleeve, and I really appreciate you saying that.

To answer your question as far as reauthorization, yes, sir. The pilot program is not just well underway, it is marching, it is speeding down the road. And we have stood the pilot program up, and we have identified six qualifying towers that meet the requirements of operations and enplanements, one of them being Phoenix-Mesa Gateway——

Mr. STANTON [interposing]. Excellent.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. And Chandler, Arizona, is the other one.

Mr. STANTON. Excellent.

Mr. MCINTOSH. We have two in Arizona, two in Hawaii, one in Florida, and one in Montana. And we are where we need to be.

I will also be honest with you. I do think we will need future appropriations to actually move that, but we have the qualifying list, and I would be happy to share that with you, sir.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you very much, and I look forward to working with you on the appropriate appropriations request.

Let's talk about Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport, one of the busiest airports in the country. They have announced plans to build a new terminal to meet demand, but the FAA is saying that it will take 6 years just to get through the review process. Mr. Heibeck, 6 years is not acceptable. What can the FAA do to shorten that timeline and move this critical project forward?

Mr. HEIBECK. Thank you for your question. I am not aware of anybody that should be saying it would take 6 years. NEPA legislation sets the standard for environmental impact statements. So even if it were that, it would be more like 2 years on an environmental impact statement. So I would like to look a little bit into that for you and circle back with your staff or you.

Mr. STANTON. Two years sounds a lot better than 6 years. Thank you.

Mr. HEIBECK. That is what is in the law, sir.

Mr. STANTON. Thank you so much.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Westerman for 5 minutes.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I think we can all agree that the primary goal of the FAA is safety, and I want to talk about an issue that I have worked on for a couple of years which poses a safety threat to my constituents who are flying in and out of the Mena Municipal Airport. That is the airport that was made famous by the Tom Cruise movie, "American Made."

Section 612 of the FAA reauthorization passed last Congress and directed the FAA to brief this committee on the radio communications coverage within the airspace surrounding the Mena Airport. It included information regarding radio communication coverage with the Memphis Air Traffic Control Center; the altitudes at which radio communication ceases, which was found to be 4,000 feet; and recommendations on how to increase radio coverage in the airspace.

First off, I am grateful for the FAA in meeting their requirement and providing this information to the committee and my office, but now we need to shift our focus on the implementation of a solution that ensures safety.

The FAA recommended two potential solutions to achieve radio coverage below 4,000 feet. The first is to "directly connect to an FAA voice communication switch via a telecommunications service." As I understand that, that is what they are doing now, the pilot gets on his cell phone and calls Memphis Center. Is that correct?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I have got to be honest with you, I don't know exactly what the technical specifications are, but as soon as you said VCS—and that is a voice switch—it is a current setup.

So—but I—to give you a better briefing, I would actually like to circle back and make sure you are getting what you want, because we are starting to get into that technical round where I want to make sure that you get the right information so we can provide the right mitigation to what you are looking for.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes, now that is what the pilots do now, they get on the cell phone and call the Memphis Tower.

So, the other recommendation is to establish a radio communications facility, an RCF, at the Mena Airport. And I am not sure what that is, but I will open it up to the panel if you could tell me a little bit about how these facilities work, what a timeline is for establishing an RCF, if you believe it would solve the problems in Mena. And also, would it be part of the air traffic control upgrades or come from existing resources?

We have included some upgrades for air traffic control in the reconciliation bill. So anything you can tell me on that?

Mr. MCINTOSH. What I can tell you is—so I don't have spectrum analysis to understand what the coverage requirements are for that mountainous terrain that you are speaking to. But at the heart of the matter, it does talk directly to the need for better infrastructure, and that is what Secretary Duffy was speaking to earlier when he was in Philadelphia, and also when he talked about Project Lift.

We need to make sure that we have the most advanced capabilities to ensure that controllers can talk to pilots, and pilots can talk to controllers, and that we can see aircraft when we are supposed to see them. And we are exploring all sorts of technologies. I think the best thing we can do is have a conversation with my technical operations team and get you the direct answer. But the direct answer is more improvements in our infrastructure to have the reliability and the performance-based navigation that we need.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Would anybody else like to add to that?

Ms. Baker?

Ms. BAKER. I do not.

Mr. WESTERMAN. And maybe in your investigations you can figure out why the Mena Airport didn't have radio coverage below 4,000 feet.

Mr. MCINTOSH. It very well could be too mountainous terrain. It could be, too, obstructions. I don't have an answer to that question, but I think it is a good one for me to go find out for you, sir.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Yes, if you watch the "American Made" movie, it will raise even more questions as to why it might not have had radio signals.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Fair enough. Yes, sir.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Ms. Davids for 5 minutes.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Thank you, and also thank you to, of course, our Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen for holding this hearing today. And I do want to especially thank our witnesses for being here.

Thank you for your service and for the work that you are doing.

Millions of passengers are able to fly in the United States every year, thanks to some of the most advanced technologies that we have. And also, as we have heard earlier, sometimes terrible tragedies happen like the mid-air collision of PAT 25 and flight 5342, which originated in Kansas—not in my district, but we were all impacted.

So I would say that in the United States, overall, we absolutely enjoy an exceedingly safe national airspace; as Mr. Stanton said, the gold standard, and so many of us do it without a second thought. But we all know, especially in this committee, that that safety isn't free, from fully implementing NextGen and upgrading our air traffic control systems to training and retaining the folks like our aviation safety specialists, air traffic controllers. I would say everyone within the FAA has a mission of safety, but we do need to continue to invest time and resources to ensure that we are protecting the flying public.

So Mr. Collins, I will come to you first. For years, the FAA funding requests for its facilities and equipment haven't necessarily kept pace with the air traffic control infrastructure needs. And I have had to, unfortunately, demonstrate this chronic lack of investment in multiple hearings of this committee, and have relayed the horror stories of safety specialists trading outdated parts between regions. Can you just speak to why is it important for the FAA to invest more than just the mere sustainment for the ATC legacy systems that we are using?

Mr. COLLINS. Yes. Aging legacy systems are a continual problem. About one-third are unsustainable, and many of those are critical to safety and efficiency.

We also have an increasingly complex and congested airspace, which is expected to grow. And you have new and expanding entrants, as well as cyber challenges, and this makes it all the more important that FAA continue to mitigate the various risks related to modernization.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Mr. Macintosh, I don't know if you want to speak to that.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, ma'am, I would, and thank you for the question.

Over 90 percent of our budget goes to sustainment of our legacy systems, while under 10 percent actually go to the future modernization. That is to keep the NAS running for some older systems or aircraft that have not equipped correctly. We need to move forward.

When we talk about generational changes and keeping us as the gold standard and innovations in safety, we need to make sure that we make those necessary improvements and investments and start talking about the legacy system of the old, and talk about future systems and make that the modern system. We need to go there.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Yes, thank you. Ten percent is probably not going to get us there, so I appreciate that.

I want to switch to another area where I see the FAA potentially looking to kind of catch up in the promotion and coordination of new and emerging technologies like advanced air mobility. I believe the U.S. has a real opportunity to lead on the global stage in this sector, but in the name of safety, first the FAA needs to set a path for that.

Ms. Baker, I would love to hear from you about the work that you all are doing. The Advanced Air Mobility Coordination and Leadership Act was passed into law to support integration of new AAM entrants by directing an interagency working group to plan and coordinate our Government efforts. And my understanding is

that much of this intergovernmental work has been completed and could serve as a foundation for interagency collaboration and progress while helping to preserve U.S. leadership and innovation. Would you be able to share with the committee when that framework would be released so that we can continue to see those advancements here?

Ms. BAKER. So I am much more familiar with the work we are doing within FAA, so I will come back with you on the specifics on when that interagency work will be done. I know we have participated in that, because it really is a whole of Government, if you think of how aviation is currently structured.

But within FAA, we are very excited about advanced air mobility. We have established a way to get the vehicles certified so we can actually get vehicles, safe vehicles, in operation, and they are going through the process of getting their type certificates. We have an operational framework that will create pilots who will be ready for those first AAM. We continue to work with my colleagues across FAA on vertiports, where these vehicles are going to take off and land, whether it is a traditional airport or something different, as well as working with our colleagues in air traffic to identify how to integrate them into the larger system.

Ms. DAVIDS OF KANSAS. Thank you so much. I got so excited about AAM I didn't even realize the—I yield my—I yield.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Mr. Barrett for 5 minutes.

Mr. BARRETT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And to our panelists, thank you for being here. And I apologize if I am asking you some questions that may have been covered by my colleagues while I had to step out for a few moments. But I want to start by following up on a question Ms. Norton asked.

I think, Mr. McIntosh, you were kind of responding to this. It was about some of the VIP transport out of DCA, and the ADS–B Out requirement. You said currently protocol is that they can only turn that off for VIP transport, active law enforcement missions, and national security missions. Is that—basically, am I understanding that correctly?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Those three, as well as what we call operational continuity in case of a real-world national event.

Mr. BARRETT. Yes, okay. I have flown VIP helicopter flights and, thankfully, we were not flying over as congested of an airspace as right here at DCA. But I just sense that there can be a mission creep that develops over time, where a straight-line corridor turns into coming to this stop and then that one, and then it deviates from the original intent. And next thing you know, circumstances and breakdowns occur and then you have a tragic, real-world collision event.

One of the outcomes of that—and I saw some testimony in the Senate where the Army testified that they had a standard operating procedure where they would turn off ADS–B during those simulated national security-type missions, but they would turn them off for the entire flight. And I don't know if you have any insight for us as to whether or not the SOP has been changed so that when you are in an airspace where you want to be seen and everyone should benefit from knowledge of your whereabouts, where you

would turn that back on. Certainly not over a classified site that you are practicing movements to, but once you are back over Reagan National Airport, I think we all want to know where you are for the benefit of the entire national airspace, and I am curious if you have any update for us on that.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I don't disagree with your comments, but I can't speak affirmatively on exactly how that change has occurred.

I do know when Acting Administrator Rocheleau made the commitment, we updated all of our orders to reflect the changes. Now, as far as those few exceptions, I would have to go back and make sure that——

Mr. BARRETT [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. I answered your question. But I do understand the importance of ensuring that you don't have either mission creep or safety creep. You have to stay on top of these things——

Mr. BARRETT [interposing]. Right, right.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. And make sure that we don't compromise and we always remain vigilant.

Mr. BARRETT. Okay. Is there a liaison between the FAA and the Department of Defense that works collaboratively in these efforts to try and sculpt these things in the best way possible?

Mr. MCINTOSH. So one of our service units in the Air Traffic Organization is security. And they are a liaison with the Department of Defense, as well as the White House, to make sure that there is daily communication and we continue to work collectively to ensure the safety of the NAS isn't compromised.

Mr. BARRETT. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH. There is a liaison to do that. Yes, sir.

Mr. BARRETT. Okay. And then I feel personally—and others may share a different opinion—that we have had a willingness to maybe transport a lot of VIPs that could take alternative means of transportation. That would clear out a lot of this hazardous situation and near-miss—I mean, the helicopter unit started operations recently, and then had a—like a 200-foot near-miss with a civilian airline again.

It causes a whole lot of concern and consideration that, if we are doing this, if we are implementing a level of risk—and everything has a level of risk to it, but if we are doing that for convenience sake instead of necessity's sake, we have got to have a better way of determining that.

Mr. MCINTOSH. So I thank you for the followup, because I do want to clarify. When I say VIP movement, it is not for personnel transfer or for that at all. As far as if we are speaking about five-star generals or four-star generals——

Mr. BARRETT [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. They are not VIP.

Mr. BARRETT. Okay.

Mr. MCINTOSH. And to your point, we are having those discussions on whether or not they should be in a helicopter at all——

Mr. BARRETT [interposing]. Right.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. Let alone have ADS–B——

Mr. BARRETT [interrupting]. Right, turned off.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. Off, out.

Mr. BARRETT. Yes.
Mr. MCINTOSH. Exactly.
Mr. BARRETT. Yes.
Mr. MCINTOSH. So that is not part of the conversation.
Mr. BARRETT. Okay.
Mr. MCINTOSH. When I say VIP, I am talking about—strictly about the President of the United States——
Mr. BARRETT [interposing]. Got you.
Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. And making sure the President of the United States has the security that he should be afforded——
Mr. BARRETT [interposing]. Sure.
Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. Like the Presidents before him.
Mr. BARRETT. Thank you.
Lastly, for the group, I know that there are a number of reports due from the previous Congress in the reauthorization around the issue of ADS–B and ADS–B Out, and whether that is autonomous or drone vehicles—drone aircraft or general aviation aircraft. I think that report is due tomorrow, like in 12 hours, tomorrow. Do we have any update as to when we should expect that?
And what the—if you have any preliminary findings for us to share.
Ms. BAKER. We aspire to make all the deadlines. I don't have any preliminary findings.
Mr. BARRETT. Okay.
Ms. BAKER. I believe we have some busy people at FAA.
Mr. BARRETT. Okay. So not by tomorrow, of course, but do you have any expectation of when we can——
Ms. BAKER [interrupting]. It very well may be by tomorrow.
Mr. BARRETT. Oh, okay, very good. Well, thank you so much. I appreciate it.
Thank you, Mr. Chair.
Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. García of Illinois.
Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Chairman, Ranking Member, and, of course, the witnesses.
Last Congress, I led a group of colleagues in an effort to strengthen consumer rights and protect labor agreements in the final FAA bill. We successfully pushed to require airlines to automatically start a refund for canceled or significantly delayed flights, instead of keeping the burden on customers. We also successfully fought to remove a provision that would have raised the pilot retirement age, undermining hard labor agreements.
Of course, I would be the first to admit that it wasn't a perfect bill. I was pushing to include, for example, my Good Jobs for Good Airports bill to increase the wages and the benefits of airport service workers, and I would have liked to see more done to increase competition among airlines to benefit consumers. But the bill did make important strides toward talent pipelines that can address urgent workforce needs in the aviation industry.
Recent incidents, including the tragic collision over DCA, remind us of just how urgent full implementation is, including workforce expansion and equipment updates. I was troubled, for example, to hear that Midway Airport, which is in my district in Chicago, relies on obsolete surface surveillance equipment, forcing them to look for

replacement parts at other airports, as previous speakers have underscored.

As we push, I do know one thing hasn't helped make our aviation system safer, and that is Trump's targeting of Federal workers. Questioning the qualifications of people who direct our air traffic is despicable. And Trump's purge of the Federal workforce undermines the aviation safety system that we are trying to improve.

For Ms. Baker, can you describe the role that aviation safety inspectors play in upholding the safety culture across the aviation industry, and why having this workforce fully staffed is important for the FAA's safety mission?

Ms. BAKER. Absolutely. So aviation safety inspectors provide critical oversight of the aviation system and how it is functioning. They also write new standards, they certify new operations, they certify—approve new manufacturers. So they are fundamental to the core of the system.

To be noted that we have identified them as safety-critical individuals, they are continuing to be hired. We have preserved that safety ASI workforce.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Thank you, Ms. Baker. My next question is for Mr. Collins.

As I mentioned earlier, I was disappointed that the FAA bill did not include the Good Jobs for Good Airports Act. Airport workers, from ticketing agents to ramp workers, go the extra mile to make travel smoother, but they also receive poverty wages and inadequate benefits. This is unjust, unsafe, and it has got to change. And while the FAA didn't include my bill, it did acknowledge the problem that my bill seeks to correct by requiring the GAO study on the importance of said workforce to the aviation economy.

So Mr. Collins, can you tell us when the GAO will complete the airport service worker analysis?

And in addition, can you share any discussions between Secretary Duffy and the GAO to convene a public working group to discuss said report?

Mr. COLLINS. So our airport service worker report will be formally issued in September. I am not aware of any particular conversations between the Secretary and GAO regarding the issue you mentioned, but I can get back to you on that.

Mr. GARCÍA OF ILLINOIS. Yes, I would appreciate it greatly, the public working group to discuss that report. Thank you, Mr. Collins and, again, thanks to all of our witnesses.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Burchett for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURCHETT. Or Burchett, either one.

Mr. McIntosh, has the FAA begun auditing legacy systems in use across the U.S. airspace to determine the optional risk, functionality, and security? And if not, when do you all plan to begin?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I am sorry, sir, can you repeat that one more time? I want to make sure I totally understand your question.

Mr. BURCHETT. Okay. Has the FAA begun auditing legacy systems in use across U.S. airspace to determine operational risk, functionality, and security?

Mr. MCINTOSH. We have looked at something that we do, a risk assessment, on all of our legacy systems to talk about vulnerabilities, potential replacement parts, and what is the likelihood of potential failures. So we do look at that. There has been a risk assessment that was done, and I would be happy to share that with you, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. I would like to have that, if you did.

Can you go over some of the new technology that is being implemented for air traffic control systems?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Some of the newer technologies that I am going to talk about, our surface safety portfolio that enhances our safety on our runways.

Surface Awareness Initiative is a new technology that we are deploying at our towers. It uses the new ADS–B technology, and it gives controllers the ability to see surface movement that they would not have seen before.

Another thing that we have deployed, sir, is something we called a Runway Incursion Device, RID. What that does is it allows controllers to use it as a memory aid. So if we have a closed runway or a closed taxiway due to construction or something along that line, or if we put an aircraft into a position that we call line up and wait—we put an aircraft on an active runway because we are waiting for either a previous departure to come off or another inbound to come across another runway—we will activate this, and it gives an aural and visual alarm to controller if it has been on a runway for a specific period of time.

And the third thing that we have deployed recently is something called ARV, which is our Approach Runway Verification. This is another aural and audible alarm that gives controllers if an aircraft is lined up to a wrong runway or actually lined up to a taxiway.

If you put these three technologies on top of one another, it forms three layers of safety. And the first level of safety and the last level of safety is a well-staffed tower, by the way. So if you have a well-staffed tower, and you have these layers of technology, that greatly enhances what we are doing in our tower environment, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. Would any of this qualify under air traffic control simulation training?

Mr. MCINTOSH. No, sir. That would be our tower simulation—our tower simulators, and we have actively deployed 56 of those so far. Those are high-fidelity simulators where a controller will go and—they will go in the simulator, and it does exactly what it says, it simulates a tower environment. When they look out in the simulator, it looks exactly like it would appear looking out their own tower. And we do scenarios, and basically that helps us certify our controllers, train our controllers.

And we have seen remarkable improvements with this new TSS system. We are actually seeing improvements where certification times come down by 27 percent. And I am not saying that we are sacrificing anything in that. What I am saying is the training is so much better, the certification times——

Mr. BURCHETT [interposing]. Right.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. Are coming down.

Mr. BURCHETT. And you said that the—there are in 50—you have——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interrupting]. We have got 56 that have been deployed thus far. The last one that just came out was in Newark Airport. And we are on pace, I believe, to have 95 deployed by the end of the year. Reauthorization requires us to have them in place—or actually, accessible to every tower in the country. And we are going to meet that deadline, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. How many more would you need to do that?

Mr. MCINTOSH. How many more are going to be needed? I don't have the number, but I do know——

Mr. BURCHETT [interrupting]. That is all right.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. I do know we are going to meet the deadline.

Mr. BURCHETT. That is all right. I am not trying to trip you up, that was just out of my—I am not sharp enough to try to trip anybody up here, so I will just—I was asking that on face value. Maybe you can get that to me.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. What is the funding mechanism for these simulators?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Through reauthorization, we have received funding for that, or appropriations.

Mr. BURCHETT. Was there enough funding in there for that, or is that—I mean——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interrupting]. I don't——

Mr. BURCHETT [continuing]. With the Federal Government, you are going to say, oh, yes, go out and print some more money, Burchett. And we will say, okay, sure.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I believe we are funded to deploy all of the tower simulators—or actually, to ensure that everyone has access to the tower simulators. But I will circle up with you to make sure that I am giving you a factual——

Mr. BURCHETT [interrupting]. Let me give you one quick question.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir.

Mr. BURCHETT. I am about to run out of time. This is one of my favorites. Have you experienced any regulatory barriers when implementing these simulators?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Have I seen any barriers from implementation?

Mr. BURCHETT. Yes, regulatory—bureaucrats, bureaucrats getting in your way.

Mr. MCINTOSH. No, sir, not to my knowledge. I have actually appreciated the support that we received.

Mr. BURCHETT. All right. Thank you.

I will yield back my remainder 2 seconds, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, sir.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Ms. Strickland for 5 minutes.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Thank you, Chairman Graves.

I first want to thank the career civil servants—a.k.a. bureaucrats—from the FAA and GAO for their testimony today before this committee, as well as their testimony yesterday before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Before I get to my question, I want to call attention to the conspicuous absence of political appointees at the table before us. As members of this committee know, it is the norm for Senate-confirmed administration officials to appear before the committee for oversight hearings just like this one. This is to ensure accountability to Congress and the communities that we represent.

What message does it send when the administration refuses to have its top political appointees testify before this committee, especially given what is happening right now with air traffic and safety, but instead decides to shield itself behind career civil servants? It suggests that Secretary Duffy, Acting Administrator Rocheleau, and other political appointees at DOT are unwilling or unready to answer to the American people on issues related to their safety.

When Secretary Duffy wants to blame the previous administration or diversity, equity, and inclusion for failures that happened under his watch, he can find his way to a TV camera. But when it is time to ask Congress for money, he shows up to speak before Appropriations. But when it is time to face the music before the committee that oversees the FAA, he is nowhere to be found, and neither is his Administrator.

I sincerely hope that, moving forward, this administration will engage with this committee, as past administrations have done, instead of hiding and not showing up to take ownership of their responsibilities that come with this very important responsibility.

Now I want to focus on aviation safety. Our Nation's aviation system has been the gold standard for decades, but a series of high-profile aircraft incidents this year and, frankly, over the past few years, have shaken the public's trust. How has Secretary Duffy's FAA responded? By firing nearly 400 probationary employees.

Additionally, around 700 FAA employees have taken the deferred resignation program offer, with thousands more expected to accept another deferred resignation offer. And this is on top of the natural attrition happening to an already understaffed and underinvested workforce.

The result of all this is a less responsive, less capable organization due to a loss of institutional knowledge and a culture of instability that affects morale and tests the trust of the flying public.

Ms. Baker, how have these reductions and fluctuations and uncertainty in workforce strength affected our overall safety at airports and for the flying public?

What is the FAA doing to ensure that irregular workforce attrition does not impede the full implementation of and compliance with 2024 FAA reauthorization law?

Ms. BAKER. Thank you for the question.

Within aviation safety, we have certain portions of the workforce that have been exempt from any of the hiring actions, and we are still hiring safety inspectors, we are hiring engineers. We continue to hire and retain medical doctors, psychologists, legal instrument examiners. And those portions of the workforce are critical to the work of aviation safety, setting standards, certifying, and continuous operational safety. So we continue focused on our safety mission just like we always have.

Ms. STRICKLAND. So as someone who is very familiar with this organization, what do you think it does to morale when people are

told, oh, you are fired, oh, wait, we take that back, you are not. How does the uncertainty of your financial security and ability to work and do well affect morale at your agency?

Ms. BAKER. I can't speculate about entire morale. What I do know is our workforce is committed to safety. I can talk about myself. I can tell you I remain focused on safety, and I encourage our workforce to continue to do the same.

Ms. STRICKLAND. Is it true that at Newark there are some employees who are taking mental health days because of the stress of the job?

Ms. BAKER. I am unaware of that.

Ms. STRICKLAND. All right. Well, thank you, Ms. Baker.

And I want to reiterate that every person at the FAA plays an important part in ensuring aviation safety. Even if you don't have a job classified as safety critical, your work is important, and it supports the work and the FAA's safety mission.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Mr. Hurd for 5 minutes.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, very much.

Mr. McIntosh, I wanted to ask you about remote towers. I understand that this is technology that has been deployed successfully in other places around the world. The London City Airport is one example, I understand. Section 621 of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act directed the FAA to create a program to design and figure out operational approvals for remote towers. Can you update us on the status of that? What does it look like? What is the timeline for that?

It is important for districts like mine, which are rural districts.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir, I would be happy to.

We do have a vendor who is in New Jersey at our tech center who currently has the remote tower on display, and actually working with our team. They are building the business case and the safety case, and we are in process of coming in behind them to actually validate that safety case and credential it.

My understanding is that it is progressing very, very well, that it is within timelines, and we are looking forward to having a product that will be available by airports that want to purchase it.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. When you say "safety case," what does that mean? What are the criteria that you use to evaluate the safety of a system like this?

Mr. MCINTOSH. There are certain thresholds that a vendor must show, as far as line of sight; if you are going to use a camera, can it pick up an aircraft appropriately; does it see around all the terminal environments; does it have any blind spots to it. Those are the kind of things, through the testing process, to make sure that if we were going to use a controller not actually in a tower but remotely, that they will see everything they would from a tower.

So you have got to build a safety case. And if there is—for some reason there is a block there, then you have got to satisfy the requirement in future [inaudible]. So you have got to have all those checkmarks in place, you have got to make sure that you validate it. And after it is validated, then we certify it. And once it is certified, we are more than happy for an airport to go purchase it.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. And this vendor—would this vendor be the one that would be approved for use in other airports, then, across the country?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Okay. And tell me about the business case. What do you mean by that, the business case for a remote tower?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Just, they have to basically provide the business proposal on what it is going to look like and how we are going to basically do a concept of operations and ensure how it is going to be available.

So that is what the vendor is doing. I know that we do have that vendor on site, and they are actually going to have something called an industry day. I am loosely putting that around parentheses, but it will be available for viewing by people that might be interested in this in summer. And we are actually encouraging people to go see this, because we see it as very promising technology, and we see it maturing to the point that this should be available soon.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Okay. I don't want to have this be a gotcha, either, this is—I am just a freshman. I can see a lot of the questions seem to be, how come the FAA hasn't done this, or when can I expect this or that by this deadline, so the spirit of this question is just genuine sincerity in knowing.

The 2018 FAA reauthorization had provisions with respect to remote towers. And here we are, 7 years later. What has been happening in that 7-year period? Like, what is the delay? It seems to me like we would ideally be able to put together a business case and a safety case for remote towers. Why has it been so long, and what is going to prevent me from being here 7 years from now or 8 years from now asking you the same question?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I think 7 years from now we are going to say that remote tower got done.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Good.

Mr. MCINTOSH. To answer your question, sir, the reason why I stressed the business case and the safety case was the remote towers that were used at some of our test locations were not able to produce that safety case where we were able to credential it or validate it, and that is very important.

The crux of all these conversations has been around safety, and rightfully so. We need to make sure that we ensure those thresholds through that safety case that you and I are speaking to because, when we certify that piece of equipment or say this is available for purchase, everyone should be able to say we can purchase it, and it will fulfill the commitment to safety, and we won't have to go back or worry about these things.

It is a very tedious process. It is tedious by design. But once it goes through, then we are in a good place. And I do feel that we are in a very good place with this, moving forward.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Great. Last question. Just stepping back more generally, can you talk about what barriers the FAA has in certifying or implementing innovative technologies over the course of the service life in our current systems?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I think that our largest obstacle in certifying new technologies is people wanting to not give up the old ones. We have some old technology, but people do not want to retrofit to take advantage of a lot of these new——

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO [interrupting]. And who are—when you say "people," who are you referring to?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Well, we have—so there are general aviation pilots. Some of our general aviation pilots don't want to do that. It is a personal choice. But for me, I think we need to start talking about best equipped, best served.

We need to start moving our advancements in technology forward so we can fully utilize our NextGen benefits. I can design a whole new New York market with PBN procedures and satellite procedures that would make all of our airports much more efficient. But because we don't want to go away from some of these legacy instrument landing systems that require vectors from controllers and altitudes from controllers versus building performance-based navigation, we cannot get to that point of efficiency and safety that we want to. We have to give up some of our past to make those technological leaps forward. It is preventing us from doing that.

Mr. HURD OF COLORADO. Thank you very much.

I see my time is expired, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

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

I now recognize Mrs. Sykes for 5 minutes.

Mrs. SYKES. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to all of the witnesses.

I just want to start by thanking you. I know the work that the Federal Aviation Administration does is very critical to the function of our Nation, and I appreciate the dedication shown by each of you for choosing to serve your country through public service.

And as someone who flies regularly, I am personally invested in this, but also the American public writ large is, as well, especially as there have been challenges in some of our major airports. And I hope you look at Members of Congress as your partners and allies as we look to find ways to improve our aviation safety and our networks.

Last year, President Biden signed into law the bipartisan FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, which is the reason why we are here today, and I am pleased to report that, through the bipartisan negotiations of the bill, several of my requests were adopted into the final language that was signed into law. Chief among those requests was to increase and expand the Airport Improvement Program for which this committee appropriated $4 billion, and this amounts to about 650 million annual dollars in increased funding for the program.

The bill also changed the Airport Improvement Program's apportionment formula to increase funding for small and mid-size airports, such as the Akron-Canton Airport, which I frequent regularly, and this is funding that the airport desperately needed. Grants from the Airport Improvement Program ensure regional airports like Akron-Canton are able to complete terminal developments, projects that address aging air infrastructure. In fact, CAK was fortunate to receive $3.6 million for fiscal year 2025.

Because of the investments from this program, Akron-Canton and other regional airports across the country have made significant improvements to their facilities that are essential in our communities and ensuring that regional airports remain a vital part of our network. However, given some of the administration's tendency to freeze funding and in some cases end it, I have some concerns about the longevity of the Airport Improvement Program and the reliability of the funding.

So Ms. Baker, I will start with you and then move to Mr. Heibeck. Have you heard of any changes being made to the eligibility criteria? And if so, what are those changes?

Ms. BAKER. I will go ahead and let Mr. Heibeck answer.

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes, and thank you, Congresswoman.

So as part of reauthorization, you are correct. In fact, there were several changes precipitated by the legislation to the benefit of smaller airports, both in the small airport fund—you mentioned one of them, the State apportionment allocation was changed so that there is now more in the State apportionment.

To answer your question, I am not concerned at all. As I indicated earlier in my testimony, we are moving forward with the entire $4 billion in the Airport Improvement Program. We thank Congress for the increase of $650 million.

The reason that you haven't seen grants there yet is we were—there is a process you go through to get your apportionment from OMB, and we now have that apportionment, and we are programming grants, and we will be moving forward with the program.

Mrs. SYKES. Great. That is good news to hear. Section 624 directs the FAA to submit a report on the process by which air traffic control towers are chosen for replacement, maintain and publish what needs to be replaced and what has not. Akron-Canton Airport has the distinction of having the oldest air traffic control tower in the Nation. The elevator breaks frequently, requiring staff members to take the stairs to the top. It is not ADA-compliant, and there is only one entrance and exit to the tower.

Akron-Canton Airport's tower is not on the list that is maintained by the FAA. I looked it up as recently as today. It was updated May 15, 2025. With all of those things that I stated, what do you have to do to get a new air traffic control tower if one like the one in my district is in such disrepair as it is today?

Mr. MCINTOSH. That is a great question, ma'am. I know that we get that asked a lot. We have a lot of towers that are 60 years old, 50 years old, and they are old, and they are antiquated.

There is a formula that produces a total composite score, and that is how they are prioritized. We take a look at line of sight from a tower. Basically, if you are an air traffic controller, can you see the entire field? We take a look at the age of a tower. We take a look at the overall facility condition of that tower, as well as the total amount of operations. And from that score, it is how it becomes prioritized. We have a list. I would be more than happy to share the list with you, and hopefully that will share where it is on that ranking list, ma'am.

Mrs. SYKES. Thank you very much. I only have a couple of seconds.

I know that there was some language that required some compliance and a report on an employee assault prevention plan. In the very limited time I have, can anyone provide us an update on that?

Ms. BAKER. I would have to go back and get the specifics. I believe we have gathered the information, and I believe we have provided a briefing, but we can certainly get back with you on that.

Mrs. SYKES. Thank you, Ms. Baker.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Mr. Mann for 5 minutes.

Mr. MANN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you all for being here today.

I represent the Big First district of Kansas, and aviation is a critical industry in our State, a lot of history. We have roughly 100 general aviation airports in my district, several commercial regional 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. I am grateful that we now have President Trump leading the way on fixing problems for the past at the FAA, and I know that this administration will waste no time in implementing the provisions set forth in our bill so the aviation industry can get to work.

Just a few questions. I appreciate what you all do.

Ms. Baker, the 2022 reauthorization created a manufacturing development program to complement existing ones focused on pilots and maintenance technicians which would help recruit, train, and retain workers critical to both safety and industry competitiveness. Can you share with the committee where the agency is in implementation of the manufacturing component of the workforce development program, and any efforts to jumpstart this program?

Ms. BAKER. Could you repeat the manufacture—the start?

Mr. MANN. Well, the specific thing is the manufacturing development program.

Ms. BAKER. Manufacturing development.

Mr. MANN. Yes.

Ms. BAKER. I am not familiar with that specific program. I will have to get back with you on that.

Again, we are committed to recruiting and training and making opportunities particularly around the area of aviation workforce grants. We have our fiscal year 2024 submissions that have come in. We are working to select out of the fiscal year 2024, we are getting ready to do a Notice of Funding Opportunity for fiscal year 2025 so that there is going to be workforce grants there.

We are also looking at how we can smooth the transition between military mechanics and the civilian workforce. So we are definitely making strides in that area. We can look into the specifics of the program you asked.

Mr. MANN. Okay, and we can get you more specifics on our——

Ms. BAKER [interrupting]. I appreciate that, thank you.

Mr. MANN [continuing]. Question, as well. So thank you.

One of FAA's most successful Government-industry partnerships, I believe, is the FAA Contract Tower program, as was previous ref-

erenced. I was proud to see several of my priorities to strengthen the program and its workforce included in the reauthorization, and look forward to the FAA implementing these provisions to ensure their stability at FCT.

A few years ago, the FAA moved administration of the FCT program to the Program Management Organization, PMO. This reorganization separated the FCT program from Air Traffic Services, and I am concerned that the separation from air traffic control practitioners and operational perspective has eroded the collaborative spirit that made it work so well for decades.

So a quick question, Mr. McIntosh. Can you provide me with the rationale as to why the FCT program was moved to PMO from the Air Traffic Services?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, sir. I would be happy to. And hopefully I can give you some idea of the organizational structure to give you a little bit of comfort there.

Mr. MANN. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH. So the PMO, it is under the Air Traffic Organization, and then we have an Air Traffic Service unit, so the Air Traffic Service unit oversees air traffic controllers, things along that line, where the PMO oversees the programs. The PMO is—they have specialties in contracts and the execution of those contracts. So those vice presidents and those deputy vice presidents, they sit in the same room next to one another, it is just we have specialization from the PMO that oversees that contract. But air traffic is there all along the way to make sure that they are giving information on the operational needs of those FCTs.

Mr. MANN. Okay, thank you. That is helpful.

Just a final question—and that would be for you again, Ms. Baker—section 818 of the Reauthorization Act directs the FAA to take action to eliminate the backlog of part 135 air carrier certificate applicants. I understand the current application acceptance or rejection time is now down to 31 days, due to FAA's appropriate actions. We have made tremendous progress. What lessons did the FAA learn in the process of eliminating the backlog, and has the agency made any changes to ensure that application approval times don't balloon again?

Ms. BAKER. Thanks for the question. I think we did a couple of things.

I think, first, we dedicated a specific team to doing these reviews, so that became their full-time job. So, specialization of experience and a dedicated team is definitely one thing.

Additionally, we are looking at how can we leverage delegation to help people through the 135 certification process, particularly for low-risk or more simple 135 certification, which means essentially there is a lighter touch by the FAA so it can go more quickly.

Mr. MANN. Great. Thank you.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Garcia of California.

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

Of course, thank you to all of our witnesses that are here, as well. Thank you for being here.

Obviously, the American public is incredibly concerned right now about the safety and stability of our air traffic control system and the FAA more broadly. I think we are seeing that. I certainly hear it when I go back home. This is a top concern of folks back in the communities I represent.

Now, this week, we have seen delays for up to 7 hours, of course, at Newark Airport—we have discussed that today—because of reduced capacity and extreme understaffing. In my home airport in Long Beach, California, I have also talked to air traffic controllers. We are short the staffing levels that we need for people to really feel safe.

And I also just saw reporting this morning that air traffic controllers in Denver actually lost radio communications for about 6 minutes on Monday. So just really briefly, Mr. McIntosh, can you confirm if that reporting is actually accurate?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question. Some of it we feel is accurate, but I don't think the severity of it was captured correctly.

So, on Monday, at Denver Center, there was a loss of one of the frequencies. And an area in Denver has multiple frequencies that they have. But we did have aircraft on one frequency, and the controllers went to their backup frequency. Every facility has got a main and a backup. When the backup went down—and it went down for approximately 2 minutes—the controller recovered via the emergency procedures that they have, and I believe it was down for approximately 2 minutes.

We also have access to another frequency, which is 121.5. That is the emergency frequency that is all throughout the country. So the controller went to 121.5, which was at their workstation, was able to transmit to the aircraft to come up to a secondary frequency for the aircraft to listen to.

It is also important to note that the aircraft at the time of that frequency outage were—they were all separated by air traffic procedures and separation standards. There was no loss of separation.

I know it said 6 minutes. I think that was overexaggerated, sir.

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA. Okay, well, thank you. I mean, obviously, regardless of the time, any time there are these outages, which are happening now, of course, more regularly, it is very concerning. And that reporting this morning adds to, I think, the concern of members of this committee.

Now, we know that there are staffing and equipment problems at air traffic control. We know that the problems have gone back decades in some cases. But it is still an absolutely shocking system failure, and we need immediate solutions.

Now, this committee, of course, did great work last year by passing an FAA reauthorization bill that makes important investments, but there is still much work left to fix the staffing challenges and build up modern infrastructure.

And I personally believe that the administration's policies have been inconsistent and incoherent with that work. Of course, they fired FAA employees, which we know has been brought up many times. Of course, Elon Musk and DOGE sent out their deferred resignation offer to Government employees. More than 700 people at

FAA accepted that offer, and that's even with the admins backtracking and scrambling to keep critical staff.

On top of that, experienced leaders across the agency are resigning—you all know this—including the heads of air traffic control and the Commercial Space Office.

Then to cap all this off, Secretary Duffy suggested there might even be more layoffs later this month, which is completely unacceptable and crazy. This is not a way to run an agency, especially if one—if we all need to know—and know that huge investments are actually needed in the workforce, technology, and infrastructure. So I am really glad that you are all here to give your expertise today.

For me, I can tell you that my single biggest question is what is the actual plan from Donald Trump—the President—and Secretary Duffy? There does not seem to be a master plan. Are there going to be more layoffs? What positions are going to be eliminated? What does the funding plan look like?

Secretary Duffy has said we are hiring more air traffic controllers, which is great if it happens. We all agree. But we also know that people in the FAA's Aviation Safety Division, Aircraft Certification Office, Flight Standards Office, and the Air Traffic Organization, folks that were fired in this last year—and we know many of them have yet to be rehired. So we are awaiting those changes.

Now, we know how important it is to get our systems right and update our radar and telecom systems. It is really concerning, of course, in the aftermath of what has happened here, the crash in DC in January, that we had Elon Musk, a White House employee, using the crisis, in my opinion, to try to make himself even richer. Now, he tweeted multiple times about having his own company take over a multibillion-dollar Verizon contract.

Mr. Collins, I know the Inspector General's Office is looking into this, as well, but I have to ask. Since January, has the FAA awarded any contracts to any of Mr. Musk's companies?

Mr. COLLINS. I would have to get back to you on that.

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA. We would definitely like to know that. Do you know if there are any plans to give new contracts to SpaceX or Starlink?

Mr. COLLINS. Our understanding is that there is a contract with Starlink, but it——

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA [interrupting]. Do you know how much that—do you know the worth of that contract?

Mr. COLLINS. I will need to get back to you on the specific——

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA [interrupting]. We would love to know that. And I am going to wrap up. And Mr. Collins, can you think of other examples when the FAA is contracted with companies owned by administration officials who are also helping make staffing and personnel decisions at your agency?

Mr. COLLINS. We are unaware of such circumstances.

Mr. GARCIA OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you for that, and I appreciate the honesty with that.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman's time is expired. Mr. Collins, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. COLLINS OF GEORGIA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Baker, a 23-year career with the FAA. Thank you, congratulations. When I saw you, I had these two questions in mind that I wanted to go over with you, if you don't mind.

And I have only been up here—this is my second term, but I have been meeting continuously with the aviation industry and the community, and I want to go over one of the most common challenges that I continuously hear, and that is the burdensome and slow certification process as compared to our foreign regulators such as—and I don't know if I—EASA, is that how you pronounce that?

Ms. BAKER. You got it.

Mr. COLLINS OF GEORGIA. Yes. As a matter of fact, I have been told that an American company, if you want to get it done faster, you just register as a foreign—in one of the European countries, get it certified over there, and then the U.S. will pretty much just write it off and certify it automatically. But if you stay here, it takes exponentially longer.

So what is the FAA doing to minimize these redundancies in the aircraft certification process?

And how is the agency improving procedures for these reciprocal approvals?

Ms. BAKER. Thanks for the question, and thanks for recognition of 25 years at FAA.

Mr. COLLINS OF GEORGIA. I am sorry, I cut you by two.

Ms. BAKER. Thank you. So we have done a couple of things. We have heard similar criticism that certification can happen more quickly overseas. Obviously, we have a bilateral agreement with various certification authorities, including EASA, which is designed to smooth that process of certification between two countries.

We have contracted Mitre, the Mitre Corporation, to do a review of our type certification process to identify those efficiencies that we can find.

Additionally, we are working to train our engineers. We have a skills enhancement program that we have incorporated to allow our engineers to learn—essentially, learn from the industry and learn more about the products. Sometimes part of certification challenges is getting something new, something new that doesn't fit into the regulatory system. We have to develop a special condition on how to certify it, and that can be a lengthy process. And by building up greater knowledge within the certification staff, that allows us to go through that special condition process more quickly.

Mr. COLLINS OF GEORGIA. I am glad to hear that, too, because I think that is one of the things that a lot of the people in the private industry tell me is if there could be more public-private collaboration—because the industry is changing so fast, and they are on the cutting edge of it, where you are just trying to certify it. And that may be a good solution for that.

Also I want to go over something else. I don't know if you are aware—I am sure you are—but I offered an amendment to the FAA reauthorization bill directing the agency to study the certification and airspace integration of hypersonic passenger aircraft so that we can get ahead of the curve and stay in front of China and ensure that the FAA is ready when this new technology gets off the ground. I want to ensure the hypersonic manufacturers don't deal

with the same delays that we were just talking about on new entrants that they face in recent years. Has the FAA begun working with NASA and aviation stakeholders to put this framework together?

Ms. BAKER. Yes, we have.

Mr. COLLINS OF GEORGIA. Is there any further update than that?

Ms. BAKER. We are in fairly early stages, but we are working with NASA to implement that particular provision.

Mr. COLLINS OF GEORGIA. Yes, I know there are companies right now that are ready to test-fly these things and sitting on ready. So I don't know if you have got a completion date in mind.

Ms. BAKER. Not a specific date, but we are aware of the company in particular, and we are working with them.

Mr. COLLINS OF GEORGIA. Yes, ma'am. Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Ms. Pou for 5 minutes.

Ms. POU. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I echo my colleagues' many concerns on the recent turmoil at Newark Airport.

I represent the northern region part of New Jersey. Newark Liberty is one of the busiest airports in our Nation. It is a central part of our region and Nation. Our economy, our constituents, and tens of millions of Americans rely on it operating. Newark is also a major economic engine in our region, supporting tens of thousands of jobs and connecting New Jerseyans with the world.

The repeated failures are completely unacceptable. They have led to thousands of delayed and canceled flights. They have shaken the confidence of the public and badly damaged the reputation of the airport. I am truly disappointed that Acting Administrator Rocheleau is not with us today, just as I am disappointed that the President has yet to nominate a permanent FAA Administrator after forcing the last one out.

At all times, but especially at this moment, we need strong, reliable, and forward-looking leadership at the FAA. To that end, last week, I led a letter with Ranking Members Larsen and Cohen to the acting FAA's chief seeking answers by May 20th, and we certainly expect to get them.

Additionally, yesterday, I joined with my New Jersey delegation colleagues, calling for an immediate surge of at least $2 billion to address the ongoing situation at the Newark Airport.

We need three things right now. We need answers, we need urgency, and we need funding.

Mr. McIntosh, 3 air traffic controllers were on duty the other day, instead of the recommended 14. How frequently does this happen?

And is there a minimum number of air traffic controllers who must be on duty at any given time?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question.

So yes, you are correct. For 1 hour, we did go down to three controllers in the Philadelphia Area C TRACON. That is atypical. It does not happen often.

As far as how many controllers do you need, we have worked on mid-shifts with just one controller, and that is normal because traffic volume is down for a mid-shift. And we have two controllers to

basically give each other a break, one that will come in and they will rotate coming through. For a swing shift that is very, very unusual, ma'am, but that is based—we had some staffing losses the day of the shift unexpectedly.

So the FAA did what the FAA always does when we have a shortstaffed facility or an extremely shortstaffed area, which we had the night that you are speaking to. When those kind of events occur, ma'am, the FAA will put in traffic management initiatives. And the night that you are speaking to, we put in a short ground delay program, which slowed down the traffic to ensure that a controller working one position by themselves can handle that volume and that traffic complexity safely and efficiently.

Ms. POU. Now, you realize that—and this, I think, is important for us to point out—so it clearly, clearly—it outlines—and if you want to talk, let's talk in clear language. What is the risk of being so understaffed? Because clearly, we already have experienced a number of different incidents all throughout the country, but especially in those particular areas where it is highly, highly utilized.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, ma'am——

Ms. POU [interrupting]. So what is the risk that we have right now? And please do so quickly because I would like to make sure that you, if you get a chance, that I want you to try to answer, as well, do you believe that Newark Airport would be facing these issues today if FAA kept Newark within the New Jersey TRACON region, instead of relocating it to Philadelphia?

Mr. MCINTOSH. The——

Ms. POU [interrupting]. So, two questions.

Mr. MCINTOSH. The move to Philadelphia was absolutely necessary to prevent——

Ms. POU [interrupting]. Why?

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. What we saw the other night. N90, the facility that owned that airspace, after over 10 years of incentives, the staffing continued to go down. And the long-term projections of that facility showed that they were going to be in really poor shape, staffing-wise, where traffic management initiatives that caused extreme delays weren't just atypical, they were going to be commonplace. We did not have an adequate pipeline of controllers wanting to go to N90. We needed to move the airspace because——

Ms. POU [interrupting]. You——

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. There are only——

Ms. POU [interrupting]. You are still understaffed in Philadelphia. You are now questioning and talking about folks not wanting to be in New York, but go to Philadelphia. If you were understaffed in Philadelphia, why would you expect that they would be in the position of being able to control both of those airspaces?

Mr. MCINTOSH. It is only one airspace, ma'am.

Ms. POU. Well, but——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interrupting]. It is only one airspace.

Ms. POU [continuing]. We are talking about a lot of the incidents and problems——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interposing]. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. POU [continuing]. That have occurred, thank you.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I want to make sure I address your question.

We moved the airspace because we had a lack of a pipeline. Since we moved the airspace, I have CPCITs. That means professional controllers who are volunteering to go there. Before, the only option we really had was sending academy graduates to the most congested airspace in the country. The success rate of our academy grads for the last 10 months at that facility was 23 percent. Only 2 out of 10, essentially, were going to make it through the program.

I have now moved the airspace. I have a high-fidelity training program over at Philadelphia Area C, as well as experienced controllers wanting to go there. Every class spot that I have at Philadelphia Area C now through 2026 is filled with a candidate that has got experience to work that level of traffic. That is why we moved the airspace.

What you saw as far as ground delay programs due to staffing shortages is something that airspace would have seen in the coming years, and it would have lasted for a long time. That airspace move was necessary to ensure that we had enough controllers to work that airspace for the foreseeable future. It was going the wrong direction. And while I know there is some pain points now, what you are seeing now is what it would have been exponentially worse in the future.

Mr. NEHLS. All right. Thank you——

Ms. POU [interrupting]. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you.

Mr. Knott, you are recognized.

Mr. KNOTT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To all the witnesses, thank you for your testimony, thank you for the expertise that you are bringing. And we certainly appreciate this discussion, as it is very important to all of us who utilize air travel so frequently.

Mr. McIntosh, I want to talk to you first. It seems as though there is a common thread to a lot of these problems, which is either understaffing or a de minimis number of people seek out to be an air traffic controller. One issue that I would like to talk about is the academy in Oklahoma. And obviously, we need to support and boost that program, but would it make sense to authorize either satellite campuses or additional footprints around the country to try to attract more air traffic controllers?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question. We are exploring Collegiate Training Initiatives, so college training programs, and we have enhanced college training programs put in place now.

We have—right now our CTIs—if someone comes out of a CTI school that teaches air traffic academia, they are a candidate pool for our FCTs, our Federal contract towers, which is welcome news to them.

Mr. KNOTT. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Because right now their talent pool, really, is retired controllers. But this allows them to grab people coming right out of those schools.

What we have done now is we have Enhanced Collegiate Training——

Mr. KNOTT [interposing]. Sure.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. Initiatives. These schools actually have applied for us, the FAA, to come in and validate their pro-

grams and say that they meet the same criteria that a student would have gone through the academy——

Mr. KNOTT [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. Meaning that when they graduate from this Enhanced CTI, when they graduate, they have the necessary background and education to go to an FAA facility directly. They bypass the academy.

The additional requirements would be they would have to pass the Air Traffic Skills Assessment, same as you would for the academy, anyway. And of course, you need a medical and you need a security clearance, rightfully so.

With these programs, that will add to——

Mr. KNOTT [interrupting]. About how many of those programs do you have?

Mr. MCINTOSH. So, right now, we just rolled the program out. We have 5 collegiate—5 programs that have been accepted, but another 30 that have expressed interest. So it is still in its infancy.

Mr. KNOTT. Okay.

Mr. MCINTOSH. We need to allow it to mature.

We are going to see our first round of graduates, and we are estimating 40 this spring. I know it doesn't sound like a lot, but we will see that number ramp up with more schools applying and being accepted. And when we start talking about where we are, if you get another 200, 250, it makes a difference.

Mr. KNOTT. A huge difference. Yes, sir. And in regards to—do you see any issue in, again, having two campuses of the academy, or is one meeting the needs of the day?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Right now, we have the main campus. We are looking at regional training centers right now that kind of help take some of the burden off of the academy. We are not looking to take any student away from the academy.

Mr. KNOTT. No.

Mr. MCINTOSH. We are just looking to rapid fire and assume some of the other additional courses. So we are looking at regional training. We actually are going to do regional training in Atlanta——

Mr. KNOTT [interposing]. Okay.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. And it makes sense to do so.

As an air traffic controller, I am sure you can imagine, your training is never over.

Mr. KNOTT. No.

Mr. MCINTOSH. You continue to go through your whole entire career, and you learn. So the ability to go to a regional training center and perhaps do an intermediate class——

Mr. KNOTT [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. And let the academy focus on just putting people through to be future air traffic controllers, that is what we are concentrating on now.

We are exploring other options, as well. It is vital to our success to make sure that that pipeline is robust and is full.

Mr. KNOTT. Right, and more locations would, arguably, add to the pipeline cultivation.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I wouldn't be able to argue with that, sir.

Mr. KNOTT. That's right.

And just on a secondary issue, in terms of artificial intelligence going into the space, have you all already seen that coming in, or is it something you are preparing for?

And how is that going to affect the future of air traffic controlling?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I know that AI has been discussed, but I don't know if it has been anything more than just—nothing concrete to actually put into a plan. We have spoken about, what is the role of AI, but I haven't seen anything concrete to move that forward, other than just conjecture at this point, sir.

Mr. KNOTT. And are there any models around the world that utilize artificial intelligence in air traffic control?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, I couldn't answer that question right now. The only AI I am aware of is some data analysis that our ASIAS group is doing. That is to basically take some of the data on safety trends and start identifying trends with an AI piece.

Mr. KNOTT. Okay.

Mr. MCINTOSH. But as far as air traffic control, no, sir, I am not aware of any.

Mr. KNOTT. Okay. Mr. Chairman, thank you. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Ms. Friedman for 5 minutes.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and certainly the chair and the ranking member for holding this important hearing.

Before I was in Congress and before I was in the legislature, I actually sat on the Hollywood Burbank Airport Commission for 6 years. I really enjoyed my time there, worked very hard to get an approval for a new terminal which is a 350,000-square-foot new terminal that will be much, much safer for the traveling public than the current 1930s, 1920s terminal.

We have heard a lot of discussion today around the impacts of the DOGE cuts to personnel at FAA, to layoffs, to over 400 probationary employees being laid off. I want to shift gears away from the air traffic control discussion and a little bit more towards airports like Burbank that are undergoing construction.

The airport received several grants from the Airport Terminal Program, including almost $10 million for this year. This is critical funding for the airport to continue its construction to keep people safe when they are traveling. But they have raised concerns regarding the staffing at the FAA because they need that staffing to be able to process and review their grant applications, to make sure that they are on track for everything that they need to do for their NEPA documents, for the airport layout plans. So that staffing is critical to airports that are under construction.

The FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 included around 500 new requirements for the FAA, all of which require sufficient staffing. So with those employees being laid off, the 400 probationary employees that the administration laid off and the others that took early retirements because of the DOGE requests, I am wondering how those airports are going to get their requests processed on time.

Committee Democrats have sent several oversight letters to the FAA asking about how the mass layoffs are going to affect the air-

port's statutory requirements with the reduced staffing, and we haven't gotten a response from the FAA. My guess is that there is nobody there to actually give us a response because they were probably laid off.

So, I wanted to ask Ms. Baker, with reduced staffing, how does the FAA ensure a smooth and timely response for critical safety projects like the one at the Burbank airport?

Ms. BAKER. Mr. Heibeck, would you like to answer about airports?

Mr. HEIBECK. Sure, I could take the airports questions.

Thank you very much for your question, Congresswoman. We are monitoring the situation.

The first thing I want to say, any probationary employee that wanted to return to work is back at work at the FAA.

Secondly, anybody who has voluntarily decided to take the deferred resignation program, we are watching and monitoring that closely, and where we find a need, we will work across geographic boundaries to fill that gap.

About your point about the safety-critical infrastructure projects, our engineers are exempt from the deferred resignation program, so they pretty much oversee all the construction of those——

Ms. FRIEDMAN [interrupting]. In terms of the grant applications, of which I am sure you received numerous grant applications all the time, the people who are helping doing the NEPA reviews, all of those processes, also require personnel. That is what people in this part of Government do. And there is just a lot less of them now. So, there is a real concern.

Mr. HEIBECK. And all of those things are a higher priority for us, and we are prioritizing our regulatory and legislative responsibilities to the extent we need to. But I can assure you that continuing to ensure that critical safety infrastructure projects advance is our top priority.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Good, I am glad to hear it, and I hope that the staffing levels are brought up so that we can reflect that.

I want to switch gears to something I don't think has been talked about, which is drones. So I represent Hollywood. I represent the Hollywood Bowl, Universal theme park, the Rose Bowl. These are all areas that are large, public venues that have thousands of people who are in outdoor spaces.

Now, there is a lot of positive use of drone technology, of course. Now, Universal and other designated entities listed in the FAA Extension, Safety, and Security Act from 2016 have to be able to mitigate potential safety risks posed by unauthorized drone risk.

In 2024, Congress again updated the deadline for rulemaking to be 90 days after the enactment of the most recent reauthorization bill, but we still haven't seen a notice of proposed rulemaking. And our venues, our public venues, are very concerned. We have the Olympics, we have the World Cup coming. We have tens of thousands of people at our theme parks every single day, and we haven't seen the rulemaking to keep the public safe with regard to unauthorized drones. And I am wondering if anyone can comment.

Ms. BAKER. So I think yesterday there was a press release from the Department of Transportation showing that those rules have continued through the review process and have proceeded to the

Office of Management and Budget. So we are getting very close to releasing the NPRM for beyond visual line of sight in 2209, critical infrastructure.

Ms. FRIEDMAN. Good. Well, I hope that this time those rules get done, and I hope that they are very protective of the public as their number-one goal.

Thank you, and I——

Ms. BAKER [interrupting]. We are——

Ms. FRIEDMAN [continuing]. Yield back.

Ms. BAKER [continuing]. Eager to see those out.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Ms. King-Hinds.

Ms. KING-HINDS. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good afternoon.

I represent the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, a Territory in the Indo-Pacific, located closer to Taipei than to Washington, DC. Our islands are home to forward-operating ports and runways that are vital to America's presence and national security posture in the Pacific. So as we review the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, I want to underscore a key principle: national security is not just about force projection; it is about economic self-sufficiency in places that matter strategically.

The resilience of our infrastructure directly affects the reliability of our deterrence posture. So if our ports cannot support steady civilian and commercial operations, they cannot be relied on in a time of crisis. When we fail to invest in economic sustainability for frontline jurisdictions like the CNMI, we erode readiness, weaken logistics, and leave the Indo-Pacific less stable. So investing in CNMI ports, airports, and workforce capacity is not a matter of regional equity; it is a matter of national security interests.

And what I have found since my time here in Congress—this is my first term—is that it is not that people don't care or they are not interested, it is that there is a lack of information with regards to how some of these policies are impacting the CNMI. And so this is not really a question, but an ask to Mr. Collins to see if we could actually get a CNMI or Territory-specific with regards to the implementation of the FAA Reauthorization Act, how the rules work towards economic development, how ports are critical to the economic development of these regions, and how the strategic value of the ports play towards the broader national security conversations.

We rely on the GAO reports to make informed decisions. I was trying to find CNMI-specific or insular area-specific studies that have been done with regards to some of the manner in which the FAA Reauthorization Act has applied to our area. I didn't find any. And so it would be just great to actually have something on record, given the fact that we lack a lot of data and there are very minimal conversations out there with regards to some of these rules.

Mr. COLLINS. So we would be happy to work with your staff and talk about a potential request around those issues.

Ms. KING-HINDS. Thank you.

I yield my time, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentlelady yields. I now recognize Ms. Gillen.

Ms. GILLEN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all of our witnesses appearing here today.

I am proud to represent New York's Fourth Congressional District on the South Shore of Long Island, which is home to New York TRACON, which is commonly referred to as N90. N90 plays a critical role in maintaining and managing the most complex and congested airspace in our country, including LaGuardia, JFK airports.

Despite the strong objections of the New York congressional delegation last summer, the FAA needlessly relocated 12 air traffic controllers responsible for overseeing Newark Liberty International Airport from N90 on Long Island to Philadelphia. This reckless decision not only uprooted critical civil servants from their families, from their friends, from their lives, it put the safety of our airspace at risk.

The FAA finalized a safety report in 2022, which clearly spelled out major issues that could arise, including data outages resulting in loss of communication lines and surveillance support. The report classifies these risks as a "major hazard." But the FAA claimed that there was only a medium overall risk because, in the FAA's estimation, the likelihood of an outage was "extremely remote."

Mr. Chairman, that is exactly what has happened. Twice over the last 2½ weeks, radar and communication systems that help controllers direct planes in and out of Newark failed for as long as 90 seconds at a time. This left controllers unable to see or talk to planes in the area. I am going to repeat that. This left controllers unable to see or talk to planes in that area, the most congested airspace in our country. This led to major delays and cancellations, and left passengers stranded.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter this article from May 9 into the record. The article quotes a former air traffic controller and current professor of aviation who calls the FAA's calculation on the likelihood of an outage "out of step with operational reality." The article also quotes the former inspector general of the Department of Transportation, who accuses the FAA of downplaying the risk of the move and calls the recent outages terrifying.

My question is for Mr. McIntosh and Ms. Baker: Do you still agree with the assessment in the report that the risks associated with this move were extremely remote?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, ma'am, I do.

Ms. GILLEN. Why is that, sir?

Mr. MCINTOSH. We followed the safety risk panel. We took everything into account as far as our redundancies and our known telco providers and what they could provide, years of reliable service, and the way that this is done, and we have had this same setup that we have in Philadelphia Area C across the country.

Ms. GILLEN. So you think two incidents in 2½ weeks is okay?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I didn't say that, ma'am.

Ms. GILLEN. So you—but you don't think it's remote?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I do believe that it's remote.

Ms. GILLEN. You do believe it's remote.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, ma'am.

Ms. GILLEN. Even though it happened twice in 2½ weeks.

Mr. MCINTOSH. The two outages were related to the same. So once they identified—once we were able to work with the telco provider who was providing the service to the FAA and we identified

exactly what occurred, we provided the necessary mitigations to prevent that from happening again.

Ms. GILLEN. Ms. Baker, do you agree with that assessment?

Ms. BAKER. I agree that air traffic did a safety risk management panel, and they found what they found.

Ms. GILLEN. Well, I think that if it happened twice in 2½ weeks, that's not remote, sir.

Knowing what you know today, would you still make that same move, Mr. McIntosh?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, ma'am, I would.

Ms. GILLEN. Ms. Baker?

Ms. BAKER. This is air traffic. Air traffic would still make the same decision.

Ms. GILLEN. And have you talked to union members who have who have said it is making their jobs extremely difficult to have to get on a phone call to talk to someone many, many miles away to talk about the airspace that they are trying to keep safe?

Ms. BAKER. I defer to——

Mr. MCINTOSH [interrupting]. Yes, ma'am, I was——

Ms. BAKER [continuing]. Mr. McIntosh.

Mr. MCINTOSH. I went and visited Philadelphia Area C the very next day, as well as Secretary Duffy. We spoke with multiple controllers, as well as multiple managers at Philadelphia Area C to assess exactly what was going on. And we also deployed a team of technicians and senior executives that worked with the provider as well as our support mechanism to provide that mitigation to ensure that that didn't happen again.

Ms. GILLEN. And in this article, the air traffic controllers talked about extreme trauma that they experienced because of these outages. Are you taking any consideration of how your air traffic controllers feel with this move?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, ma'am. Our controllers' mental welfare is always one of our top concerns. We care about our employees. That move was necessary to ensure the vitality of the New York market remained in an upward trajectory versus where it currently was and what we were forecasting it to be.

Making moves like this aren't easy decisions, but we made the decision what was in the best interest of the NAS and also in the best interest of the flying public.

Ms. GILLEN. Well, are you still——

Mr. NEHLS [interrupting]. The gentlelady's time is expired. If you want that entered into the record, Ms. Gillen, I will do so, without objection.

[The information follows:]

Article entitled, "Internal FAA Report Downplayed Risks of Data Outage Affecting Newark Air Traffic Controllers," by Blake Ellis, Casey Tolan, and Kyung Lah, CNN, May 9, 2025, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Laura Gillen

INTERNAL FAA REPORT DOWNPLAYED RISKS OF DATA OUTAGE AFFECTING NEWARK AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

by Blake Ellis, Casey Tolan, and Kyung Lah
CNN, May 9, 2025

CNN—Before the FAA moved air traffic controllers who oversee the Newark Liberty International Airport airspace to a new site in Philadelphia last year, the agency's experts concluded the odds of a dangerous communications breakdown were extremely unlikely: 1 in 11 million, according to an internal report obtained by CNN.

In reality, the safety concerns officials downplayed appear to have occurred multiple times since the new system went into place last summer, according to multiple controllers.

Data outages—including a failure of about 90 seconds of radar and radio service last week—have repeatedly left controllers without the ability to see the locations of planes they were tracking. The problems led to several controllers taking trauma leave from work and sparked the massive flight delays and cancellations that have roiled Newark over the last week and a half.

Yet a 2022 FAA report about the relocation concluded that despite the "major" severity of a potential data outage, there was only "medium" overall risk because the chance of it happening was "extremely remote."

Aviation experts told CNN that the conclusions in that report—as well as another report from 2024 that evaluated risks of air traffic controllers in two different locations struggling to coordinate—should raise questions about the agency's safety analysis.

Mary Schiavo, who served as inspector general of the Department of Transportation during the '90s and reviewed the reports for CNN, said she thought the conclusion on the likelihood of the data feed failure was "outrageous and terrifying."

"There was the added risk because they were creating a Frankenstein patchwork" of multiple data systems, Schiavo said. While the report found that failures of the radar data transmission "would be a major hazard," the reviewers appeared to be "downplaying it because they didn't think it would happen," she said.

An FAA spokesperson did not respond to questions about the safety reviews but said in a statement that the agency "applies our standard safety risk management methodology when we implement new equipment, operations, and procedures; when we make changes to them; and when a safety issue is identified in the system."

A spokesperson for the air traffic controllers union, NATCA, which had several members participate in the safety review process, declined to comment.

The "Safety Risk Management" reports were conducted as the FAA planned to relocate air traffic controllers overseeing planes headed to and from Newark. For decades, they had worked alongside other controllers who covered the approach to John F. Kennedy and LaGuardia airports from a facility on Long Island.

But in response to staffing and training issues at that site, the FAA moved about two dozen controllers to a new facility in Philadelphia in July 2024.

The 2022 study, which was conducted by a panel of 11 FAA experts and representatives from the union, evaluated the technological challenges of that move. According to the report, radar data on planes headed to and from Newark would be transmitted from the Long Island facility to the new location in Philadelphia via eight commercial telecommunications infrastructure lines.

A FAA spokesperson did not respond to a question about whether all eight lines were actually installed and are currently active.

In the 2022 study, panel members identified "loss of telecommunications lines" between Long Island and Philadelphia and the resulting "loss of automation services and surveillance support" as a potential hazard. They decided that an outage would have a "major" severity, as controllers "would have insufficient means to surveil aircraft" and be hindered in their "ability to continue to vector aircraft safely."

To determine the likelihood of such a loss in telecommunications, the panel members reviewed information about previous "full facility outages" at US airports. They concluded that from May 2018 to December 2021, there had only been one full outage at 35 major airports around the country—a failure lasting six minutes at JFK airport.

As a result, they calculated that the likelihood of an outage in the Long Island to Philadelphia data lines was about 1 in 11 million—an "extremely remote" chance

that allowed them to classify the risk of telecommunications lines being lost as "medium."

The report required the FAA also install additional hardware that could transmit radar data directly from Newark airport to the Philadelphia location, so it could still work even if there was an outage at the Long Island facility. With that change, the panel voted to downgrade the "residual risk" of the problem to "low."

The cause of the outages that Newark controllers have experienced over the past year has not been publicly confirmed by FAA officials. But aviation experts said that the issues flagged by controllers in recent months raised questions about the validity of the 2022 report's conclusions.

Timothy Johnson Sr., an assistant professor of aviation at Hampton University and a former air traffic controller and training manager for the US Air Force, said that the idea that there was only a remote chance of an outage seemed to be "out of step with operational reality."

"While it may reflect past outage data in a general sense, it doesn't account for the complexity, volume, and interaction density" associated with the unique Long Island-to-Philadelphia system, he said. "Risk isn't just about how often something happens, it's also about how severe the consequences would be if it does . . . In my view, that probability estimate was used to justify inaction rather than drive preemptive safeguards."

Schiavo, the former DOT inspector general, agreed and argued the data analysis was conducted in a way to justify the "extremely remote" chance of an outage and "to put a number on something so they could ignore the risk."

Given how controllers losing radar service could potentially lead to a catastrophe, she said the panel should have weighed that possible hazard more heavily than the likelihood of it occurring. "They listed out all these things that could happen, including losing radar," she said. "That's exactly what happened."

A person familiar with the FAA's safety risk management process told CNN that "it's not uncommon to have a medium finding" on risk assessments, adding that it's rare for reviews to conclude a hazard has a "high" risk. Typically, FAA works to mitigate the "medium" risks and moves forward, according to the person, who asked not to be named because they were not authorized to comment.

The report also says that some panel members questioned whether the "bandwidth" of the system that transfers data from Long Island to Philadelphia "would be robust enough to support the level of incoming data," although they did not include that issue as a potential hazard because the system was designed to handle it.

The FAA said in a statement Wednesday that to address issues at Newark, the agency planned to install three new high-bandwidth telecommunications connections between Long Island and Philadelphia to "provide more speed, reliability and redundancy," and replace "copper telecommunications connections with updated fiberoptic technology that also have greater bandwidth and speed." The 2022 report did not mention the use of copper or fiber technology.

The 2024 safety report, which was finalized just days before the move took place in late July, covers the procedures for controllers in Long Island overseeing the approach to LaGuardia and JFK to work with the Newark approach controllers in Philadelphia.

The report identified several potential hazards with the arrangement, including "reduction in situational awareness" and "operational personnel confusion/misunderstanding," largely because controllers were used to working in the same room but would now have to communicate over landlines.

"This relationship has historically relied on in-person/immediate communication," the report stated, adding that some controllers were concerned "that efficiency would suffer should in-person interaction be removed, and the time delay may have an impact on safety."

The panel concluded that the risk would be reduced because there would be "shout lines" that allow controllers in the two locations to communicate with each other more quickly than through landline calls. The report states that "Tech Ops conducted four live tests to ensure that (Philadelphia) had sufficient communication with" the Long Island facility.

The review concluded that the risks were "medium" level and could be partially mitigated by additional training of controllers.

However, reports filed by several controllers in the weeks after the shift to Philadelphia show that some of the personnel confusion issues identified in the study apparently did happen. A half-dozen controllers filed confidential reports outlining problems with coordination between the two locations, CNN reported this week.

The controllers' union, NATCA, which opposed the move to Philadelphia, filed a letter of dissent on the 2024 report, arguing that the study hadn't been thorough enough and that the FAA hadn't provided the union enough time to review its plan.

"The failures of the FAA and the rush to complete" the review did not allow the panel to effectively evaluate the change, the letter argued.

The person familiar with the FAA's safety risk management process confirmed that the 2022 and 2024 reports obtained by CNN were final versions. The agency also conducted two other safety reports on the Philadelphia move in 2021, related to airspace realignment and training waivers, which CNN has not reviewed.

Schiavo said the potential dangers outlined in the reports help explain the nightmare scenario that unfolded last week when controllers lost radio and radar.

"It's terrifying what happened," she said, "but when you read these documents, you understand that they created a mishmash of a system that really wasn't tested (and) hadn't been done this way before."

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you.

Mr. NEHLS. Mr. Onder, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Dr. ONDER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to all the witnesses here today.

Mr. Collins, the FAA has spent, in your testimony, $14 billion on NextGen since 2007, with overall costs projected to hit $35 billion by 2030. Has the GAO seen a good return on this Federal investment, or is there evidence that we are spending more for less?

Mr. COLLINS. We think implementing our open recommendations would help improve the modernization effort, in particular around program management and providing cost, schedule, and timelines for the various initiatives.

Dr. ONDER. So you noted in your testimony that the FAA has yet to implement 9 out of 11 GAO recommendations related to modernization and delays. Have you identified specific barriers that prevent the FAA from acting out your recommendations in a timely way?

Mr. COLLINS. We have not identified the barriers that FAA has. What we find helpful is when Congress emphasizes the need to implement our open recommendations.

Dr. ONDER. Okay, good. The act, Mr. Collins, directs the FAA to maximize air traffic controller hiring and evaluate limiting factors. Based on your current work, what are the most significant bottlenecks that the GAO has identified in preventing the FAA from hitting its hiring targets?

Mr. COLLINS. So that work is ongoing. That team is focused on recruiting, hiring, and training. And we hope to have that report issued in the fall.

Dr. ONDER. Yes, and we have heard quite a bit about that from the other witnesses.

In several areas—controller staffing, drones, airport infrastructure—you noted the FAA has initiatives underway. Is the FAA clearly identifying the performance metrics and outcomes taxpayers should expect from these initiatives?

Mr. COLLINS. So in our prior work, identifying performance measures has come up across several of the initiatives underway.

Dr. ONDER. Okay, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Figures for 5 minutes.

Mr. FIGURES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to each of you for being public servants and also for being here today. I al-

ways say in these things the good thing about seeing me means that you are getting close to the end most of the time.

But I represent district 2 in Alabama. It is the southern third-ish of the State. And so from Mobile to Montgomery, a great aviation history. Tuskegee is in my district, obviously, the Tuskegee Airmen, a storied history there. Mobile is currently in the process of building a new international airport, which—the head nods—is warming to me to know that you guys know about that. But it is a huge infrastructure project, a huge investment that the area is undertaking.

Can you guys—Mr. Heibeck, can you tell me the impact that tariffs are—that you guys are seeing have on construction projects, or particularly for terminals and airport upgrades? And how is the FAA looking at ways to mitigate potential impacts so that it doesn't make these projects unfeasible?

Mr. HEIBECK. Thank you for the question, Congressman, and I just want to say that I met with the Tuskegee airport, so——

Mr. FIGURES [interposing]. Yes.

Mr. HEIBECK [continuing]. They have a good number of projects there that they are looking at. Unfortunately, I am not aware at this point of any impacts that the tariffs are having on our construction projects.

Mr. FIGURES. Got it. And shifting over to an issue I know that we have spent a lot of time on today, but the staffing shortages in general, Ms. Baker, I will direct this one to you.

Recent staffing reductions at FAA have obviously raised concerns not only about the internal capacity, but also about the consistency of communication and oversight across the system. I think we all have the same goal at the end of the day for these systems to be as safe as they possibly can. What do you see as the biggest challenge created by the staffing shortage?

What is the most immediate threat created by the current staffing environment that we are seeing at the FAA?

Ms. BAKER. So again, the great thing about aviation safety is we have been able to protect so much of our workforce and maintain a lot of our workforce.

The greatest challenges to us is something that we were actually accustomed to dealing with, which is turnover of employees, folks taking new jobs. Again, we are a resilient workforce, it is not unexpected to us. But every time we move somebody, there is a spool-up period for learning a new job.

We remain focused on areas of risk, and that always is our priority.

Mr. FIGURES. Got it, got it. And coming back to this airport terminal, Mr. McIntosh, in Mobile, the—oh, I am sorry, Mr. Heibeck.

With the slowdown in funding streams that we are seeing, and cuts, and different policy shifts towards grantmaking, how are we ensuring that growing regional airports like Mobile, those that need to grow, that are legitimately in the process of growing, how are we making sure that they can continue to access those infrastructure funds in this current environment, those funds authorized by the reauthorization of 2024?

Mr. HEIBECK. I think there is good news there in that the Reauthorization Act—and again, thank Congress for the increase in Airport Improvement Program funding to $4 billion.

The Reauthorization Act also included other provisions that expand funding and funding eligibility for smaller airports in the country. For example, State apportionment funding. The minimum amount of apportionment for nonhub airports went up from $1 million to $1.3 million. So I think there is—this is a step in the right direction, and that the Reauthorization Act provides a good bit of funding to the small and regional airports.

Mr. FIGURES. And is there a lot of unobligated money in those pots that you just spoke of that has yet to——

Mr. HEIBECK [interrupting]. No.

Mr. FIGURES [continuing]. Reach the airports?

Mr. HEIBECK. No, we are fully executing to the law.

Mr. FIGURES. Okay.

Mr. HEIBECK. And I stated earlier that the Airport Improvement Program for fiscal year 2025 is just getting underway. We had an appropriation, but it takes a little time after that to get an apportionment——

Mr. FIGURES [interrupting]. Get it out the door. And did the President's funding freezes impact any of that money?

Mr. HEIBECK. We just recently announced $790 million in grant funding under IIJA, and also, as projects under the Airport Terminal Program are ready to go under grant, we are doing one final review of those before we are rolling those grants out.

And in addition, like I said, the AIP will start moving very shortly.

Mr. FIGURES. Well, I appreciate it, and I appreciate you guys' time.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. Wied for 5 minutes.

Mr. WIED. Well, thank you all for being here. It is great to see you. My first question is for Mr. Heibeck and Mr. McIntosh, either one or both.

As we discuss modernization efforts of the National Airspace System more broadly, it is important to me to ensure that smaller airports like in my district—we have got two great airports in northeastern Wisconsin in Green Bay and Appleton—to make sure that they are not left behind. It is these airports that don't have, as you know, the 24/7 ATC staffing that rely the most on critical automated systems like AWOS and ASOS weather reporting to ensure that operations can be carried out safely at all hours.

With this in mind, is the FAA committed to ensuring that smaller airports like ours that rely on these systems the most are prioritized in any system modernization efforts moving forward?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes. I would go back again and just repeat that the Reauthorization Act has made certain changes to formulas and funding streams, as well as set up new programs geared toward smaller airports.

There is a secondary runway pilot program instituted by the Reauthorization Act, as well as a small airport letter of intent program; usually that was reserved for larger airports.

So, yes, under the great leadership of Congress in setting forward these provisions, we will execute to that law. And so, yes, we will support modernization of small airports.

Mr. WIED. Great, all right. So Ms. Baker, as I am sure you will agree, safety is the primary concern for all FAA requirements, especially those relating to aircraft manufacturing. In some cases, the FAA and foreign regulators have different safety standards or approaches to the certification process, including high-risk flight testing and fire protection standards.

Last year's FAA reauth, specifically sections 311 and 313, instructed the agency to focus on harmonizing these regulatory standards internationally. Can you provide an update on where the FAA is at in this process?

Ms. BAKER. We have ongoing conversations with our international partners. We have several regularly meeting workgroups. We have our certification oversight board. We have our bilateral oversight board with EASA. So we are always working on issues of harmonization.

Around improving the type certification process, we have made an arrangement with Mitre to do a study for us on how to make the type certification process more efficient, and we are also taking a look at using flight test or using analysis, i.e., digital twins, something along those lines, in lieu of high-risk flight tests. So, we are executing against all of those provisions.

Mr. WIED. Okay. Thank you. Additionally, the reauthorization focused on the importance of sufficient resources and training for FAA's certification workforce. Can you tell the committee what efforts have been undertaken to bolster certification personnel in their critical safety oversight responsibilities?

Ms. BAKER. Absolutely. So our certification personnel are exempt from any kind of hiring freeze, so we continue to hire engineers to the workforce.

Additionally, we really are leaning into—we call it our aviation skills—I am drawing a blank on the end of that acronym. Essentially, what the program does is it gets our engineers out to manufacturers, not just the manufacturer that they are assigned to, so they can learn about new technologies coming into the system, new manufacturing procedures. And we are sharing that across the larger workforce so they all become more efficient, they all get better at the work in general.

So, yes, we are doing work around certification engineers.

Mr. WIED. Okay, great, thank you. And lastly, the commercial drone industry has already provided millions of dollars in savings while also saving many lives. Recent natural disasters including wildfires in California, earthquakes, and flooding in North Carolina have highlighted the critical role drones play in emergency response.

In order to realize the industry's full potential to reduce traffic congestion, lower carbon emissions, and improve worker safety, the FAA must publish rules to allow drone operators to conduct beyond visual line of sight operations, which right now is only permitted by exemption.

Section 930 of the FAA Reauth Act of 2024 directed the FAA to publish a draft of the Visual Line of Sight rule within 4 months

of enactment, and that was on September 16 of 2024, and finalize the rule within 16 months. A proposed rule was prepared last year, but was stalled at the OMB's Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs.

So, in February, the proposed rule was resubmitted for executive level review. Do you have any insights into the timeline for this rule and when you think it will likely be published?

Ms. BAKER. No one wants this rule out more than I do, and it did make another step yesterday. It is now back with the Office of Management and Budget, so it is continuing its review. It is very close—it goes through that next stage of review, then it can be published as an NPRM. So it is back with OIRA.

Mr. WIED. So what would be the hangup? Like, what is causing the delay?

Ms. BAKER. We have got some interagency feedback that we needed to address at the previous OIRA review, and got some feedback to incorporate. It's making the rule better, and now it's moved back along.

Mr. WIED. Okay. Well, thank you all.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Mr. DeSaulnier for 5 minutes.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I want to thank the witnesses for being here. It is exciting, and I feel a good sense—I think the whole committee does. And I will say personally, just for having been involved in this bipartisan effort to reauthorize what was long overdue, and the infusion of money that the FAA asked for, and the comments now from the Secretary and the administration to add to that.

But on the other side I still—it is hard to change a culture. I have said this before, there is this institutional deviation when it comes to aviation, where we recognize that there is risk and there has been not the proper investment, but it is sort of acceptable. So one of the real challenges I sense is the level of urgency, why you have to be methodical and you have to be thoughtful.

There is still is—we are in a race against time. We have been for some time. And all those near-misses were warning signs of a system that needed this investment. So I just say that as an overall observation, and if any of you have any comments, please be specific on my questions.

Mr. McIntosh, last week, Ranking Member Larsen and I were in the SFO tower. I represent an East Bay district. I have spent a lot of time with your members, particularly on the west coast. One of the things that came up was not just attracting—and I like everything you are doing about incentivizing people to get in, so I would like to ask two questions of you. Something came up in that conversation that should be obvious to all of us: burnout of people who are right at the prime of their career.

So a lot of what the conversation there was was retention, that people are leaving early or they are not working at close to what their full, attentive, trained capacity is because of the burdens right now while we wait for this infusion.

And the second part of the question is, how do we go upstream? We know that the—as you said, in your background, that the mili-

tary was the perfect training for you, for pilots. And this goes to comments I have had from a famous pilot in my district who has called me and said about kids coming out of the academy as pilots have never flown in real inclement weather in-person. So they go off to the regionals, and his—and I have heard this from other pilots—is they are not ready.

So, how do we, first of all, deal with the retention right now, the urgency?

But then how do we go back and create an aviation corps—I am thinking of some of the things we have done with unions to do academies in high school so they get credits and get out.

So both at the retention and then a sustainable, realistic process to attract and retain young people into the field. First on retention.

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question, a lot to chew on there.

So when I take a look at the recruitment and the retention, they are directly related. As a controller, I will tell you the biggest thing that was burnout for me was when we were shortstaffed. If you are shortstaffed, chances are you are working 6-day workweeks, and you might even be required to work some 10-hour days to cover some short or some—if you—if someone calls in sick, you are understaffed, or you are shortstaffed on a swing shift, you might be held over for 2 hours. That is where some of the burnout is coming from, sir.

So the remedy is what currently Secretary Duffy is proposing with the supercharged hiring, ensuring that the academy is full, that we pull all the levers to get the influx of talent into those field facilities.

I said this at the start of this hearing, and I will say it now: It is going to start and end with staffing. Our staffing needs to improve. Once the staffing improves, once we make sure that we are supercharging our hiring, we are ensuring that every academy seat is filled with the most qualified, best, and the brightest, we are offering the incentives through Secretary Duffy's leadership on the 30-percent increase—or the 30-percent increase in pay for our academy candidates as well as the 20-percent retention bonus, that is going to help keep people longer to train this pipeline that we are having.

As far as making sure that we change the culture, behavior comes first; culture comes next. I believe you are seeing some behavioral changes now by the commitment that you are seeing from our Acting Administrator and the Secretary, as well as the commitment from everyone that is sitting at this table. We are here because we believe in the process, we believe in safety, and we believe in making sure that our employees believe in us because we believe in them.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Mr. McIntosh, I am going to interrupt you just because the other thing is, they don't get compensated enough in high-cost areas. We have never caught up to this, but that is where most of the traffic is. Could you comment briefly on this?

People can't afford to live in San Francisco or New York or Boston.

Mr. MCINTOSH. So I spoke about some of the recruiting efforts. One of the things that we have looked at is—and it is being de-

ployed now—is incentives for hard-to-staff facilities. And there are also some pay differentials for some of those higher cost living. So I know that that is being reviewed, as well.

As far as San Francisco, I think another thing we will see from the benefit is, we have just implemented, as an interim measure, a new staffing model that—or a staffing number with the Collaborative Resource Workgroup. That is going to bump our numbers up as we wait for the Transportation Research Board to come back with their new staffing model recommendations. So that is going to help give us more controllers in some of these facilities, and that will help with some of that burnout, as well.

Mr. DESAULNIER. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. Mr. Kiley, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks to all the witnesses for your testimony today.

I think it is important when we have these hearings to focus, certainly, on the pressing needs of the present as we have been doing today, addressing the disruptions we have seen in the commercial airline space, as well as the staffing, urgent staffing needs when it comes to the FAA and air traffic controllers.

But I think it is also important to keep an eye on the future of transportation. And indeed, the FAA reauthorization bill did that with several measures assuring that the FAA will be well positioned for new and emerging technologies. So I wanted to briefly discuss those issues, and to pick one of those specifically is air taxis. I think that, for a lot of Americans, this still seems pretty futuristic. But the reality is, there are a number of companies that are pretty much ready for prime time. I think the entire, sort of, viability of the 2028 Olympics in L.A. might rest on having a good fleet of air taxis available.

So—and I will direct this to whoever would like to take it—what should we expect when it comes to air taxis? When will they start to be used? How prevalent will their use be? What kinds of uses do we expect to see? And importantly, how safe will they be? Will the safety level be more comparable to riding in a commercial airliner or driving a car?

Ms. BAKER. So I will go ahead and start with that. The office—Aviation Safety Organization is responsible for the integration of advanced air mobility. We see lots of different uses. We see cargo, short-haul cargo. We see potential, as you described, air taxis, maybe short-term movement to and from airports, amongst urban areas. Those are all models that companies seem to be coming up with.

The first step is a certified aircraft. We would certify to the same equivalent level of safety that we would certify another small aircraft. So, small aircraft for commercial use. That is essentially the standard we are certifying to. We are in the middle of ongoing certification, so there are companies going through that process right now in various stages of testing and proving that their vehicles meet those minimum safety standards.

Additionally, we have a regulatory set out there to transition the new pilots. The early models of advanced air mobility will be piloted, so we are working—we have this rule set that will allow for

transition from currently experienced pilots into this new category of aircraft powered-lift.

We have this regulatory set that will also set up the operating standards around them. So for example, current rules talked about fuel standards. If these vehicles are electrically powered, what is the equivalent level of power reserve. So, we have that rule set in place.

Additionally, we have work across with my fellow colleagues on what is necessary to integrate AAM.

Mr. HEIBECK. I always like to say because they have to land somewhere, we are preparing for AAM. We have updated our engineering brief to—it is called EB 105A. It provides the standard for vertiports. It is an existing standard, a design standard.

Reauthorization also requires us to update our Heliport Advisory Circular and our Vertiport Advisory Circular to provide a performance-based standard. We are going to be going through testing as we get conforming aircraft coming to be presented for certification to aviation safety. We will be collecting data from that to inform those advisory circulars and get those set up.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Any other thoughts on this?

You mentioned, Ms. Baker, that initially they are going to be piloted. So does that suggest that ultimately the vision here is autonomy, much as we are starting to see for cars?

Ms. BAKER. I think that that is a business model that is out there. I think that is a good question for manufacturers. There are certainly some manufacturers that definitely have their eye on autonomy, but I think we will see that eventually.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Are we envisioning within, let's say, the medium term, 5 to 10 years, maybe a little longer, that these air taxis will be in common use, or will it sort of just be for, kind of, specialized purposes and big cities, maybe between major cities?

Ms. BAKER. I think the market will, sort of, bear that out.

When I first started in DC in 2006, we were talking about very light jets. And the phrase that we had in the building was very light jets were going to darken the skies, and that didn't necessarily play out. So we are ready to enable the AAM business model, and I am eager to see where it goes.

Mr. KILEY OF CALIFORNIA. Well, I think it is a very exciting set of possibilities from this technology and others that really could revolutionize the movement of goods and people in a way that improves all of our lives. But of course, in order to usher that future into being, it is essential that we have safety so that people trust in these new modes of transport. So thank you for the work you are doing.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. The gentleman yields. I now recognize Ms. Scholten, 5 minutes.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, and welcome to our witnesses today. Public service is a high calling, especially when the stakes are high, as they are in air travel. So I really want to thank you for your service. We are nearing the end of our grueling testimony and hearing today, so thank you so much for bearing with us.

This is truly a unique moment in the aviation space, at a time when public confidence in aviation safety is on the decline. Even as we know it has never been more safe to travel by plane, we cannot ignore the public sentiments about this. We need the FAA to continually recommit itself to not only keeping our skies safe, but to ensuring that the public feels that way and they understand how safe that it is. Every day, Americans are worried about their family's safety on flights. As I travel back and forth between Washington, my constituents ask me all the time about the safety of flying.

On top of that, our President is accepting a luxury aircraft from a foreign country.

On top of that, the administration has reportedly targeted FAA employees who are integral to FAA safety in the name of efficiency. This is unacceptable.

I stand ready to work with my colleagues and the DOT to regain the public trust. This starts with the swift implementation of the 2024 FAA reauthorization.

I am a strong supporter of aviation infrastructure modernization, including the replacement of an aging air traffic control tower in my district at the Gerald R. Ford International Airport. I hope my colleagues will indulge me. Perhaps next to Coos Bay, they have heard more about the Gerald Ford aging tower than almost anything else. What can I say? We are champions for our district.

However, the FAA has failed to meet the statutory deadline and has yet to submit a report to Congress on language that I championed and was passed into law through the FAA process last year.

Mr. McIntosh, can you please share a status update on the FAA's obligations under section 624 of the recent reauthorization, as well as describe why the FAA is delayed in submitting this report?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the question. And also, thank you for the affirmation that it is safe to fly. It is. I fly every single week, as well, and never do I ever board an airplane ever worried that there is going to be an air traffic situation or a problem with the aircraft, due to Ms. Baker's diligence, as well, as well as Mr. Heibeck's overseeing the airport environment. So thank you for that affirmation.

In regards to your question, the status of 624, the air traffic control tower replacement process, yes, ma'am, we are finalizing the report, and I can absolutely offer that report. My team and I will be happy to offer that report and brief your office on the tower replacement project. We would be happy to do that. We are also putting it online so everyone can see it, so everyone has full transparency. But again, if you don't want to go online, we would be more than happy to brief you.

As far as the delinquency, I wasn't aware that it was delinquent. I came in today and I do know that we are filing a report, and we are happy to say that we are going to be able to take this one off the list, ma'am.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you. I appreciate it, and we look forward to it. We accept your invitation of an individual briefing.

I want to ask about the presence of DOGE at the agency. I know my colleagues have been asking a lot of questions about that. This agency came in and was created to boost efficiency. Mr. McIntosh,

has the presence of DOGE increased or had any type of impact, negative or positive, on the agency's efficiency or performance?

Mr. MCINTOSH. So I was asked this question earlier. I haven't witnessed DOGE in the FAA. I haven't seen them. I haven't corresponded with them.

In regards to efficiency——

Ms. SCHOLTEN [interrupting]. So is this your—is it your testimony that they don't have any presence at the FAA?

Mr. MCINTOSH. My testimony is that I haven't seen them. I haven't interacted with them.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. So you don't know if DOGE has had any impact. You have not seen DOGE having any impact enhancing efficiency or decreasing efficiency.

Mr. MCINTOSH. No, ma'am, I haven't. I have visited air traffic controllers and facilities, and my interactions with them have strictly been—and their feedback to me has been—they were looking for infrastructure improvements, as well as improvements to staffing. Those are the things that come to me. Those other items that you discussed have not come up in our conversation.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. And have you seen those come to fruition, then?

Mr. MCINTOSH. As far——

Ms. SCHOLTEN [interrupting]. Staffing changes and the improvements.

Mr. MCINTOSH. So I have not seen the infrastructure improvements yet, but we are very hopeful, through bipartisan legislation, that we will see that, because controllers are, quite honestly—and I said this in the hearing yesterday—we talk about being the gold standard. I just want to make sure that we remain there by investing in our infrastructure and investing in the controllers and the technicians that use them every day. And then the flying public will benefit from those safety measures, as well. We are excited about it.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you, Mr. McIntosh.

I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you.

To the panel, we may have a couple of Members left. Are we okay to continue?

Yes? All right. I now recognize Mr. Taylor for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you, Chairman, Ranking Member, for holding this hearing today, and I also want to thank the witnesses for being here, for your time and expertise and the sacrifices you all made to be here. We appreciate you very much.

With domestic international aviation travel rising in the United States, it is imperative that the FAA does everything in its power to keep our skies safe. I am excited to work with members of this committee and the FAA to implement the best policies and procedures to keep our constituents safe while flying, while ensuring ease at the airport.

In my district, I represent one of the fastest growing airports in the State, and this is the Clermont County Airport. As southern Ohio continues to attract new businesses and families to Clermont County, airport traffic has grown each year, hosting more than 36,000 takeoffs and landings in 2024. As the Clermont County Air-

port attracts more visitors and travelers, it is vital to ensure the safety of those traveling through southern Ohio.

Mr. Heibeck, what, if any, special steps does the FAA take with smaller airports that are growing quickly to ensure that they have the infrastructure, technology, and resources to safeguard passenger safety?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes, well, I would say that, under our Airport Improvement Program and our discretionary funding program, when you say with respect to safety, that has some of the highest priority ratings that we give, and it is a very structured process. For example, I always say if you are at the center of the runway and you move out, you can expect the priority to go down. So, as you get to terminals, it is lower.

So, with respect to any airport, regardless of its size, if it is competing for discretionary funding for us, the higher priority safety projects, regardless of size, will score better than lower priority, like, as you move out from the runway to the lower priority projects.

Mr. TAYLOR. Okay, thank you. Airports across the country rely on the Airport Improvement Program to help improve safety and efficiency. Funding from this program allows airports to build new runways, ramps, taxiways, and make needed repairs on existing infrastructure.

However, many of the airports in my district fall into the nonprimary entitlement, and can only receive up to $150,000, far less than larger airports. Even though these more rural, smaller airports have less air traffic and require less money, the AIP funds can be vital for many small towns.

Mr. Heibeck, from your experience, can you just talk more about how important AIP funds are to helping small airports, and what we can do in Congress to maybe improve this program?

Mr. HEIBECK. Yes, and I believe you have taken an important first step in that in some of the formula changes you have made in the Reauthorization Act. The State apportionment funding has had a significant shift upwards, and that is used by States to reach the smaller airports, and so that is a great step there.

And just again, on the safety side, that will always rank higher than other projects, regardless of airport size, when it comes to the discretionary pool.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you.

A quick one, whoever wants to take this one can take it, and maybe we can get a couple people's input on it. No one should be afraid of flying in the United States. Obviously, the tragedy that occurred at the DC airport in January is heartbreaking, and my heart goes out to the friends and families and loved ones who lost someone in that terrible crash. What actions has the FAA taken following American Eagle flight 5342 to ensure tragedies like that never occur again?

Mr. MCINTOSH. I will take that, and thank you for the question. And again, it is safe to fly.

We took immediate action after the accident occurred. Secretary Duffy met with Acting Administrator Rocheleau, and we implemented changes right away. We put in a corridor that prohibited mixed-use traffic, meaning helicopters could not interact with

fixed-wing aircraft. We also made sure that ADS–B Out was—that mandate was adhered to, and we updated our orders to reflect that. We also restricted the use of visual separation within the immediate vicinity of DCA. We increased our controller staffing at DCA, as well as our supervisor presence.

I think, to get to where your question is, Mr. Taylor, we took those lessons learned on helicopters and mixed traffic with commercial traffic, and we applied those to other cities that had very similar helicopter route patterns. And those lessons learned, we went out to those 10 cities and we started looking at commonalities. Was there safety drift there, as well? If you had a chartered helicopter route and it was close proximity to an airport like Las Vegas, we implemented vertical and lateral confines, making sure helicopters stayed within points, and we had safe separation between arriving and departing aircraft.

We are working with our labor partners to make sure training is robust and that we learn from an incident like this to make sure that the NAS safety margins even improve from where they are now.

Mr. TAYLOR. Thank you, sir, and thank you to all of you.

And, Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. NEHLS. Thank you.

Ms. Hoyle, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a Member with one of the longest commutes in the contiguous United States and no direct flights, I spend a lot of time on planes, and talking to pilots, and talking to air traffic controllers, and talking to the people that support the support staff that help our air traffic controllers do their jobs. And right now, they feel they are under incredible stress because a number of them got fired.

I do appreciate, and I told Secretary Duffy I appreciated him standing up to Mr. Musk saying, "You can't fire the air traffic controllers," however, a number of them took the deferred retirement. A number of them are being recruited by other countries, where they feel they are going to be valued. And the support staff that support the air traffic controllers in doing their jobs and fixing the equipment and what not did get fired. So then, all of a sudden, they were called back to work on social media. That is not how we should treat employees. If you don't treat your employees well, why would they want to work here? They have other options. So fundamentally, you don't rebuild trust by treating people like they are disposable.

Now, when I talked to Secretary Duffy, I said, "What is your top priority?" and he said fixing the air traffic control system. And I said, "I will work with you and anybody here on making sure that happens. It is important that we have safe air traffic control and people feel safe flying." But I did say with the caveat that I do not believe that this should be privatized. This is a Government function. We do not outsource our safety and national security to a private entity. So fundamentally, we do need to commit to real investments.

And I did hear one of my colleagues talking about recruiting, training, and retaining staff. It is not DEI, right? It is not woke to say that we should treat people well who show up to do their job

and are highly qualified, regardless of where they come from, their gender, what race they are. And that is critical that they feel valued.

Now, what I will say is that we have a crisis, and we have talked about air traffic control towers. In Oregon, we have the Hillsboro tower that is so old that they can't even put in a tower simulation system because there is literally nowhere to put it. The FAA reauthorization says every tower should have one by 2028, but that promise doesn't mean the facilities can handle the equipment.

So basic gear like headsets to talk to pilots, those are failing. Backups barely work. We have got controllers working 6 days a week, 10-hour shifts, and we are short 3,600 certified controllers.

So my question is, I think lots of people have asked about, how are we going to get our air traffic control towers up to speed? But secondly, what specifically are you doing to make sure that the people that are coming to work at the FAA feel like they are valued and that their job is going to be there tomorrow?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Thank you for the opportunity to let me respond.

Every day, I have conversations with my team, and they know exactly how valuable they are. I am a career employee. I have got 25 years in the FAA, and I have got 4 years in the military. They know how much they are valued. In my conversations with Secretary Duffy and Acting Administrator Rocheleau, they tell me the very same thing. Everything that we have talked about has been the significance and the importance of individuals coming in and doing their jobs and keeping the skies safe.

Controllers and technicians were never part of the deferred—DRP. They are exempt. They were not fired. They were not part of that conversation.

When we talk with our teams, they understand their significance in ensuring that they support the air traffic organization and being successful of their mission of keeping people safe. We don't have a job; we have a profession. It is a profession we take very seriously, and it is a profession that we all take great pride in delivering to the United States and the people that fly the skies.

Ms. HOYLE OF OREGON. I will in just the time I have left—although those two positions were exempt from the deferred resignation, there were resignations. There are air traffic controllers that are being recruited by other countries where they feel like it will be less stressful, they will be more valued, they will have what they need. And the support staff who support the mechanics and the air traffic controllers, they were let go or pushed to leave because—again, I don't know how we replace them, but it is—I want to support you in doing your job in keeping your employees, and I want to support Secretary Duffy doing his job, provided we understand that this is a critical Government function, and we can't have 20-year-olds come in and just break it all apart, because that puts all of us in danger.

So again, thank you for your work today.

Dr. VAN DREW [presiding]. The gentlelady yields back. I will yield to myself.

First of all, I have prepared remarks. I am going to use a few of them. They were thoughtful and methodical, et cetera, but I've got to do my thing here, and I want to start out by thanking the

FAA for the work that is done. There are a lot of good people who work very hard, give it their best, and do their job. I have 1,600 of them at the tech center in my district alone, but there a lot more than that throughout the country.

I want to thank Secretary Duffy—nobody—maybe I didn't hear it because I have been in and out—for the work that he is doing. Man, talk about a tough job. The guy comes in, his first 100 days, and all of this is thrown on his lap, and he is dealing with it, and he is focused, and he is fired up. And the Acting Administrator, as well. They are doing a job.

I want to talk about—this is a tough, tough week for New Jersey, to be honest with you. It has been a tough few weeks for New Jersey between what happened in Newark, at the detention center, at the Delaney Center—I am chairing my own committee meeting on that, we are not going to bring that up here—and then Newark Airport. It proves a point. And it is not the employees, but it proves a point.

We transferred air traffic control from New York City to Philadelphia. And this was under the Biden-Buttigieg administration—let's be clear—that we did this. We did that knowing that we had corroded copper wire, that we didn't have a STARS system in Philadelphia, that we were short of air traffic controllers there, that the main runway in Newark was being worked on—the main runway of two main runways there—and redone. We did that again in the past administration, when there was bad technology all around.

I had the opportunity a couple of times at the Atlantic City International Airport to actually look at their air traffic controllers, and these folks in the last administration, they were using floppy disks. They couldn't even get them at the regular—the way that supplies are normally gotten. They have got to go to, like, discount stores somewhere for people that have aged technology that nobody is using anymore. That is not your fault. I am not blaming you for that.

And what were we worried about? I am sorry, I am going to be the one to say it: What were we worried about in the last administration? Man, I didn't hear a lot of talk about improving infrastructure, about America being number one in the world as far as infrastructure. You know what I heard about? I heard about—and yes, there were DEI, I heard about what pronouns do we use. I heard we had to change the name of the cockpit. I heard that we had to be concerned about bathrooms and how we dealt with them, and what was a men's room and women's room, transgender, whatever it was. I heard we were discussing tree equity. I don't even know what tree equity is, but we were discussing it. We were discussing racist roads and bridges. I am talking about infrastructure in general, but it applies here.

What we should be worried about, what you all are worried about is national security, public safety, and making America number one in the air again. That is the real world. That is what we were dealing with in the last 4 years. That is what Secretary Duffy and the Administrator have to clean up now, what all of you have to do, what all our good employees have to do. Damn it, we should stay focused on what the real issues are. That is the job of the

FAA. It isn't all this other—and yes, it was woke crap that doesn't belong there. And I don't mean to be crude, but I am telling the truth.

So with that being said, Mr. McIntosh—and thank you guys. I mean, you have been there a long time. You have got to be tired, you really do. I hope they are feeding you coffee, at least, and you are staying awake. Why was the air traffic shifted from New York to Philadelphia when their systems were and still are in such disrepair?

And I know we have already gotten some fiber in, we have done some other stuff, we are going to get the STARS system, et cetera, but why—was that shift really—did that have to be made?

Mr. MCINTOSH. We did have to make that shift, sir.

And again, I also want to say one thing, because I don't want to do a disservice to the controllers at N90 or the ones who are currently at Philadelphia C. They do a phenomenal job——

Dr. VAN DREW [interposing]. I agree.

Mr. MCINTOSH [continuing]. Every single day. They work the most congested airspace under some high-stress situations. They are phenomenal.

Our concern with Philadelphia or with the Newark TRACON and N90 was we had some real recruiting issues for that facility. Trying to find highly qualified controllers to go and certify was a problem for us. We were largely dependent upon the academy to give us students to work that most congested and most complex airspace in the world, and we were only seeing a success rate between 20 and 25 percent for these academy graduates.

Me, I don't want to send someone who is straight off the street to go to the most complicated airspace to try to learn air traffic. It is not a formula for success.

We took a long—at where the current staffing was at N90 and where it was 10 years before, and it was going the wrong direction, despite a decade of incentives. A change was needed to change the trajectory of what that facility was going to look like. And what I mean by that is we wanted to make sure the staffing was going to get better.

By moving the airspace, we had a lot of people who were not interested in going to N90 interested in going into the new Philadelphia Area C. As a matter of fact, all of our classes that we have scheduled—or this pipeline I am speaking to—is filled between now and the middle of 2026 with experienced controllers to go learn this airspace, and they are excited to go do that.

That is the reason why we moved the airspace, was to make sure that we actually had future growth and a pipeline for this new area.

As far as the infrastructure and what you are seeing at Philadelphia Area C right now, I think this speaks to the current condition of our infrastructure. You are seeing it take its progression, and now it is starting to show cracks. We are starting to see our redundant systems that were always reliable before starting to fail. And we need to start putting in some of the new infrastructure requests that Secretary Duffy is speaking to as far as the new fiber lines, as far as a dedicated STARS line to Philadelphia Area C, ensuring

that the frequencies work and that the controllers there have the best equipment available.

So I do believe we take a look at the current infrastructure and where it is cracking, and we improve it to where it is now. But to answer your question, yes, I do believe that airspace move was required.

I received a very tough question, which was, knowing what you know now, would you have moved the airspace back last summer, and my answer was yes. And the reason why it was yes was because sometimes the right decision is hard, but you have to stand by those hard decisions knowing that it was the right call.

Dr. VAN DREW. I thank you, Mr. McIntosh. And I've got to tell you, we are now in this administration going to focus money towards recruitment, towards incentivizing people to come in, towards infrastructure, and doing the job that needs to be done.

With that, I will yield to Ms. Titus, the gentlelady from Nevada.

Ms. TITUS. Yes, thank you very much.

With all due respect to my colleague's comments blaming the last administration for the problems at airports, I just would remind him that he was here when we passed the FAA reauthorization bill. He voted for it. I don't recall a lot of amendments that he might have introduced that dealt with some of the problems he is now criticizing the last administration for. They would have been well——

Dr. VAN DREW [interrupting]. I will give you an extra few seconds. I talked about it over and over and over again. Continue.

Ms. TITUS. Yes. Reclaiming my time, also I hope that the DOGE people will let you spend that additional money on infrastructure. I don't see any evidence of that. Mostly it has been cutting things with infrastructure. But okay, I will take you at your word that we are going to make these great investments.

Now I would ask you, Mr. McIntosh, one of the things I had in the FAA reauthorization bill was to call on the National Academies' Transportation Research Board to look at the way we analyze the need for air traffic controllers. They were to do a report that maybe we rethink the formula that was to be due in December. We haven't seen that. Can you tell us what the holdup is, or when we might be able to have that as a guide for how we move down the path to getting more air traffic controllers?

Mr. MCINTOSH. Yes, ma'am. You are correct, we did, as reauthorization required us to do, we contracted the Transportation Research Board to analyze our staffing model and also analyze it against the new Collaborative Resource Workgroup that was a collaborative project between the agency and NATCA. We are waiting for them to finalize that report. When that report is finalized, then the FAA will take those recommendations and develop a new staffing model.

We expect the TRB report to be out this summer. But as an interim gap, what we have implemented was the new CRWG numbers to ensure that we actually put more controllers in those positions. So, that is the stop-gap measure which was required by reauthorization, as well, was the implementation of the CRWG as we wait for the recommendations from the TRB.

Ms. TITUS. Is there any way we can make corrections if those recommendations come out different from what you are using as a stop-gap?

Mr. MCINTOSH. My understanding is, from the TRB recommendations, the FAA will take those recommendations and make that to be a new staffing model.

Ms. TITUS. Okay. Thank you. Well, I think that would be helpful if we are going to make all these improvements, invest all this money, let's do it the right way so down the road 10 years from now, we won't be back in this same difficulty that we are in now, behind the eight ball.

Ms. Baker, I would like to ask you about your faith in the National Transportation Safety Board. This was created in 1967 as an independent body. It has investigated more than 153,000 accidents, issued more than 15,500 safety recommendations. Now we have the news that Alvin Brown, the vice chair, has been dismissed. He was sworn in in April 2024. He is supposed to run his term through 2026.

This isn't the first time a member has been removed. I am sorry, this is the first time a member has been removed. We see it happening at the FTC. We see it happening at the National Labor Relations Board. These independent agencies seem to no longer be independent.

Do you have faith that they can investigate all these accidents that are occurring thoroughly and independently?

Ms. BAKER. The NTSB has many, many career investigators, just like the FAA has many, many career employees. I have no reason not to have faith in the NTSB.

Ms. TITUS. Well, could you just put on the record how important it is for this agency to remain independent and not to be politicized or weaponized by the current administration?

Ms. BAKER. I believe that the NTSB has its own legislation, and it should follow its own legislation, as well.

Ms. TITUS. Well, the legislation was that they weren't to be dismissed, and that's not happening, so I don't think you can count that as a guarantee.

Ms. BAKER. I understand your concern.

Ms. TITUS. Okay. Thank you, and I yield back.

Dr. VAN DREW. The gentlelady yields back. Are there any further questions from members of the committee who have not been recognized?

Seeing none, that concludes our hearing for today. I would like to thank each of the witnesses for your testimony and for just holding out for a very, very long hearing. We appreciate you.

And the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 2:03 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE RECORD

Statement of the Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International, Submitted for the Record by Hon. Sam Graves

On behalf of the Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI), thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony as you evaluate the implementation of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 118–63). 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.

AUVSI is the world's largest non-profit organization dedicated to advancing uncrewed systems, autonomy, and robotics. AUVSI represents over four hundred corporations and eight thousand professionals across more than sixty countries in industry, government, and academia. AUVSI's members span the defense, civil, and commercial sectors and multiple transportation domains, inclusive of hardware and software companies. Our member companies design, build, and operate uncrewed aircraft systems (UAS, or drones) as well as counter-UAS systems for detecting and mitigating drones. We also represent leaders in advanced air mobility (AAM), including manufacturers, aircraft autonomy providers, component suppliers, and infrastructure developers.

P.L. 116–83 was a landmark step forward for the entire aviation and aerospace industry. It contained critical provisions intended to accelerate the integration of drones and AAM technologies into the national airspace system (NAS). AUVSI commends Congress for its leadership in crafting a future-ready aviation framework. However, significant portions of P.L. 118–63 implementation remain off track, and delayed action by the FAA on several mandates risks undermining U.S. leadership in global aerospace innovation as our competitors, and adversaries, race ahead.

We are at a pivotal moment in aviation history, with drones and AAM aircraft (which include both regional and urban passenger and cargo carrying applications) 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 cost-effective solution for critical operations including public safety, package delivery, precision agriculture, utilities maintenance, infrastructure inspections, and much more. AAM 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.

The UAS and AAM industries require enabling rules and regulations given the new technologies entering service. Safety, not bureaucracy must drive this process—new regulations in this space will enable rather than restrict U.S. innovation and leadership. We encourage Congress and the FAA to streamline the rulemaking process generally, and specifically across UAS and AAM initiatives. The current regulatory structure for UAS and AAM is overly burdensome because it was created with traditional aircraft in mind. Updated enabling rules and regulations will act as a means of deregulation that enables these innovative technologies to flourish.

A critical step toward streamlining the FAA's rulemaking process is the swift implementation of Section 202 of P.L. 118–63, which requires the FAA Administrator to create an Office of Rulemaking and Regulatory Improvement headed by an appointed Assistant Administrator. The creation of the office and the elevation of rulemaking within FAA will help to ensure accountability and responsibility for rulemaking timeliness, which are often presently lacking.

Without timely regulatory clarity, the promise both UAS and AAM technologies will remain unrealized, and we will continue to see nations like China win the global aviation competitiveness race. The FAA must move swiftly to implement new rules for beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) drone operations, aircraft certification,

and airspace integration technologies such as UAS traffic management (UTM). It must also ensure that operational approvals for emerging AAM aircraft are efficient, transparent, and based on performance rather than legacy prescriptive frameworks.

While AUVSI's diverse membership is deeply invested in the implementation of several P.L. 118–63 provisions, we want to take a moment to focus on the BVLOS draft safety rule/final rule and how the associated costly delays.

> The drone industry is standing on the precipice of a new era. With the right regulatory framework, the U.S. can lead the world in drone innovation and integration. The timely issuance of BVLOS safety rules will unlock the scalability of high-value operations. According to various studies, the drone industry is projected to contribute billions of dollars to the U.S. economy over the next decade. But, without the BVLOS rule in place, much of this potential will remain untapped.
>
> Unfortunately, the BVLOS draft safety rule, and therefore the BVLOS final rule, has languished, plagued by bureaucratic delays. The deadline for the FAA to release the BVLOS draft safety rule no later than four months after the enactment of P.L. 118–63 has come and gone, and the industry is feeling those impacts. Importantly, this means that unless the FAA issues the BVLOS draft safety rule in the very near term, the FAA's issuance of the final rule will undoubtedly slide to the right in the calendar, which will ensure the U.S. falls further behind other nations in the deployment of advanced aviation technologies.
>
> It is important to note that the notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) has already been written and began undergoing the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) interagency review process last year, and AUVSI conducted multiple meetings with OIRA and various segments of the UAS industry to make the case for the issuance of the NPRM. Unfortunately, the draft safety rule was not issued for public comment before the January 20 change in administrations and the associated moratorium on rulemaking activities.
>
> Releasing the NPRM and final rule in a timely manner is a requirement of Section 930 of P.L. 118–63, which was enacted into law almost exactly one year ago. The expeditious release of the BVLOS NPRM and subsequent final rule, pursuant to Section 930 referenced above, would build on the drone policy agenda of the first Trump Administration, which was the last time that enabling drone regulations were promulgated. In the meantime, the FAA needs to maintain the current process for authorizing the limited drone operations that are in the pipeline before the BVLOS rule is final, so operators can continue to effectively plan and make informed business decisions.
>
> Today, drone operations BVLOS require costly, lengthy, case-by-case FAA approval processes which inhibit companies from scaling in the United States and can make beneficial operations cost-prohibitive. The rapid expansion of drone technology in sectors such as public safety, agriculture, infrastructure inspection, and delivery services have the potential to transform key areas of the economy and provide significant societal benefit, as we have witnessed most recently in the hurricane response efforts.
>
> This expansion is also necessary to buttress domestic manufacturing efforts while supporting our national security. Drones can be used for ongoing surveillance of large areas during events like natural disasters, potentially reducing the need for extensive ground patrols. They can enter buildings and disaster zones where it would be unsafe to send in a human. Drones can monitor fires and wildfires, enabling more effective decision-making and resource allocation. Drones are deployed to assess damage, monitor hazards, survey affected areas, and deliver aid following disasters such as tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, wildfires, and infrastructure collapses. They provide valuable situational awareness to emergency responders and help them coordinate relief efforts.
>
> Further delays to the BVLOS rules will continue to hamper the drone industry from scaling to new heights. We encourage Congress to work hand-in-hand with the Trump Administration to issue the draft safety rule as soon as possible for public comment—the vitality of this industry depends on it.

Moreover, we urge Congress to conduct robust oversight of FAA leadership to ensure they are fully activating the tools Congress provided in this legislation to ex-

pand real-world testing environments, strengthen industry-academic research partnerships, and fund state and local planning for UAS and AAM infrastructure. Equally vital is investment in workforce development. The FAA has been entrusted with meaningful resources to prepare our current and future workforce for careers in uncrewed systems. It is imperative these funds be deployed strategically and promptly, in collaboration with community colleges, universities, and training organizations.

AUVSI supports the FAA's safety mission and recognizes the challenge of keeping pace with transformative technologies while maintaining rigorous standards. However, innovation cannot be deferred indefinitely in the name of caution. Industry is not seeking shortcuts—we are seeking certainty. The rules, processes, and systems that enable growth must be defined, tested, and deployed.

As the Committee continues its oversight of P.L. 118–63 implementation, we respectfully urge you to press for transparency, stakeholder engagement, and measurable progress. The next generation of aviation is not on the horizon—it is here. The decisions we make today will shape the United States' competitiveness, resilience, and global leadership for decades to come.

In conclusion, AUVSI urges the Committee to prioritize oversight of Title IX, Subtitles A and B of P.L. 118–63, to ensure the FAA is keeping up with mandate timelines, with a keen focus on the following specific provisions throughout the legislation:

GENERAL

- Establishing the Unmanned and Autonomous Flight Advisory Committee—Section 916
- Make maximum use of the recently announced Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies to support emerging aviation technologies—Section 961
- Center of Excellence for UAS—Section 1006
- FAA UAS and AAM research and development—Section 1044

UAS

- Electronic conspicuity study—Section 906
- Remote identification alternative means of compliance—Section 907
- Improving the Part 107 waiver process—Section 908
- Pilot program for UAS inspections of FAA infrastructure—Section 911
- Drone Infrastructure Inspection Grant Program—Section 912
- Drone Education and Workforce Training Grant Program—Section 913
- Extension of the Know Before You Fly initiative—Section 922
- Extension and expansion of UAS test ranges—Section 925
- Extension of authorities under Section 44807 and transferring those authorities to FAA—Section 927
- Directing the FAA to issue a BVLOS NPRM and final rule expeditiously—Section 930
- Expeditious approvals of third-party service providers—Section 932
- Operations Over the High Seas—Section 934
- Prohibiting Department of Transportation (DOT) funds from being used on contracts/grants for covered UAS—Section 936

AAM

- Establishing the Advanced Aviation Technology/Innovation Steering Committee—Section 229
- Shifting AAM regulatory functions from the FAA NextGen Office to the Office of Aviation Safety—Section 206
- Allowing airport energy assessments to include power demands for airside and landside operations, with funding support for related projects—Section 742
- Establishing program guidance for the AIP Pilot Program for AAM ground support equipment—Section 745
- Streamlining environmental approvals for vertiports by applying or establishing categorical exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act—Section 953
- Expanding and extending the AAM Infrastructure Pilot Program through 2026—Section 960

Thank you for your commitment to innovation, safety, and a strong U.S. aviation ecosystem. AUVSI and our members stand ready to work with Congress, the FAA, DOT, and all partners to realize this vision.

APPENDIX

QUESTION TO JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. SCOTT PERRY

Question 1. Can you please provide the committee with all the FAA's reports and responses to the February 27, 2025, Memorandum from OPM Acting Director Charles Ezell, Regarding "Agency Reporting to OPM for Fiscal Year 2024 Taxpayer-Funded Union Time Use"?

ANSWER. See attachments.

[Editor's note: The attachment, consisting of tab A, tab B, and tab C, is retained in committee files and is available online at the House of Representatives document repository at https://docs.house.gov/meetings/PW/PW00/20250515/118270/HHRG-119-PW00-20250515-QFR001.pdf. Per the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA): "The attached Excel spreadsheet is part of the response to Rep. Perry's question concerning FAA responses to OPM's official time report request. That report was published here (with aggregate data for DOT): https://www.opm.gov/about-us/reports-publications/agency-reports/fiscal-year-2024-taxpayer-funded-union-time-usage-in-the-federal-government/"]

QUESTIONS TO JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. VINCE FONG

Question 1. There is a lot of money being spent on developing drones for use by the U.S. military. In some cases the drones are getting larger and going faster, the collaborative combat aircraft program is a great example of this trend.

How will the FAA use its authorities, like section 927, to help speed up innovation and allow more execution in this area of drone testing?

ANSWER. The FAA's authorities are primarily over civil aircraft, including the civil use of drones, however the development of new technologies and innovative uses in civil settings could provide valuable insights for the U.S. military. We are active and collaborative partners with the U.S. military and work regularly with the military on airspace, security concerns, and other issues. In addition, the FAA has used the authorities provided for in section 927 of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act to authorize civil operations for the purposes of testing and development of UAS or UAS technology intended for military use. For example, working with the U.S. Air Force, the FAA recently issued its first waiver using the section 927 authority to Hermeus Corporation on April 4, 2025. The waiver authorized civil flight testing of a 9500-pound hypersonic UAS, in coordination with the Air Force and their Special Use Airspace near Andrews Air Force Base. The FAA will continue to examine strategic use of this statutory authority to support.

Question 2. The 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act strengthens the role of the FAA's UAS Test Sites to facilitate safe testing of new aviation technologies in the unmanned aircraft space.

While the Act does not explicitly direct using overwater areas, don't you think it would make sense to utilize overwater areas as much as possible with innovative aviation solutions—especially larger, unmanned aircraft? If the aviation industry wishes to utilize overwater test ranges to enhance the safety of their operations, is anything preventing FAA from authorizing flights beyond 12 nautical miles?

ANSWER. The FAA supports operational testing overwater and has already authorized many UAS operators to utilize the UAS Test Sites including airspace within

the 12 nautical mile boundary of the territorial airspace of the United States for testing and ongoing operational purposes.

When aircraft operations are conducted outside the territorial airspace of the United States (beyond 12 nautical miles from the baseline of the U.S. shore), those operations are conducted over the high seas. Airspace over the high seas is international airspace, and aircraft flying in international airspace are engaged in international navigation. The Convention on International Civil Aviation (the Chicago Convention), a treaty to which the United States is a party, applies to all civil aircraft operating in international airspace regardless of whether the aircraft takes off and lands in the United States with no intermediate stops.

The Chicago Convention contains binding provisions that apply to any civil aircraft engaged in international navigation, including the requirement to possess a certificate of airworthiness issued by the State in which the aircraft is registered, that such a certificate of airworthiness be based on compliance with at least the minimum international airworthiness standards established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), and the carriage of specified documentation. Furthermore, Article 12 of the Chicago Convention provides that over the high seas, the rules in force are those established under the Convention without exception.

If a U.S. registered Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) is not able to fully meet minimum international airworthiness standards or other applicable requirements for international navigation, the FAA is not able to authorize their operation over the high seas.

President Trump has directed the FAA to immediately explore options to ensure that UAS flights beginning and ending in United States airspace, or United States-owned facilities in the high seas, can operate without being subject to the onerous requirements applicable to manned aircraft engaging in international navigation as referenced in the Chicago Convention. While the U.S. is working with ICAO to identify acceptable means of compliance with all applicable Chicago Convention requirements in order to enable various types of UAS operations over the high seas, those measures are still being identified and will need to be promulgated by ICAO, and the FAA would need to initiate rulemaking to issue regulations that conform to the new ICAO standards.

QUESTIONS TO JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. STEVE COHEN

Flight Data Recovery from Overwater Operations

Question 1. A key provision in the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act is Section 352, "Flight Data Recovery from Overwater Operations," requires a long overdue National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) recommendation to improve FDR and CVR standards. Specifically, Section 352 directs the FAA to complete a rulemaking proceeding within 18 months of the bill's enactment to require all newly manufactured commercial passenger aircraft that operate extended overwater routes to be equipped with an FDR/CVR system capable of providing all FDR/CVR data without an underwater search and recovery. It also requires a tamper-resistant method to establish the location of a downed aircraft and an underwater locating device capable of functioning for at least 90 days.

Please provide a status update regarding the FAA's ability to meet the stated timeframe for implementation of Section 352. If the FAA is concerned about the mandated timeframe, please describe what timeframe the FAA does believe would be achievable and what factors are contributing to this recommendation?

ANSWER. The Investigative Technologies Aviation Rulemaking Committee (IT ARC) was established and began working in 2023. The committee was tasked with providing recommendations to address the NTSB safety recommendations discussed in section 352 of the Reauthorization. The ARC charter was amended in December 2024 to communicate to the committee impending rulemaking related to section 352. In amending the charter, we tasked the committee with providing the FAA with impact and cost-benefit analyses to ensure a complete and adequate economic analysis for the rulemaking effort. The IT ARC will provide those analyses to us in August 2025. Once the report is received and reviewed, the FAA will begin the rulemaking process, which will delay the implementation timeframe specified in the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act.

Question 2. The FAA's Investigative Technologies Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) original task regarding automatic deployable flight recorder (ADFR) technology stated that the ARC will develop recommendations "*on whether to allow*"

the use of ADFRs. However, the NTSB has already identified ADFRs as one possible technology that satisfies the safety recommendations forming the basis for Sec. 352 of the FAA reauthorization bill. The International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) updated Annex 6, Part 1 addresses international flight recorder Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPS) that include definitions and guidelines for the allowed use of ADFRs on commercial air transport aircraft. The European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) provides for the use of ADFR, Distress Tracking Emergency Locator Transmitters (ELTs), and high-rate tracking technologies to comply with new Location of an Aircraft in Distress requirements, along with certification specifications for installing ADFRs on large turbine-powered airplanes. A major global aircraft manufacturer is also already installing ADFRs on its long-range extended overwater commercial passenger aircraft.

Given the extensive actions already established to address the safe operation of ADFR technology on commercial aircraft, has the FAA clarified that the Investigative Technologies ARC's task is to develop a recommendation to update FAA rules for ADFR and data link recording technology that align and harmonize with international rules?

ANSWER. The NTSB recommendations and section 352 do not specify ADFR technologies. However, FAA tasked the IT ARC to discuss issues and develop a recommendation on whether to allow the use of ADFRs that may currently be contrary to FAA regulations. The FAA is awaiting recommendations from the IT ARC, which are expected to be submitted in August 2025.

Question 3. The FAA's Investigative Technologies Aviation Rulemaking Committee (ARC) original taskings included references to "*whether to require*" aircraft used in extended overwater operations under Part 121 or Part 135, which are required to have a CVR and a FDR, be equipped with a tamper-resistant method to broadcast to a ground station sufficient information to establish the location of an aircraft after the flight has terminated due to a crash within six (6) Nautical Miles of the point of impact in consideration of the mandate in section 352 of the Act (A–15–1), and "*whether to require*" newly manufactured aircraft used in extended overwater operations under part 121 and part 135, which are required to have a CVR and FDR, to be equipped with a means to recover mandatory flight data parameters; the means of recovery should not require underwater retrieval (A–15–3)

Please confirm that the FAA has updated the ARC's charter to ensure they will provide recommendations for Rulemaking for the full implementation of these new laws.

ANSWER. The FAA updated the ARC charter on December 12, 2024, to address section 352. The IT ARC submitted an interim report in January 2025.[1] The ARC reported that the analysis and recommendations for this task were in process.

Question 4. It is the Committee's understanding from public NTSB and FAA official correspondence that the FAA had a misunderstanding regarding Safety Recommendation A–15–3, requiring all applicable newly manufactured aircraft used in extended overwater operations to be equipped with a means to recover, at a minimum, mandatory flight data parameters in a timelier manner that does not involve underwater recovery of the recorder devices. The misunderstanding was the FAA's initial belief that Recommendation A–15–3 calls for three recorders to be installed. The NTSB has clarified multiple times in public record that the Recommendation A–15–3 does not require three recorders, and that there are several possible solutions that would satisfy the NTSB's recommended action that the FAA require mandatory flight data and cockpit voice parameters to be recoverable other than by underwater retrieval, to include for a single "combination" flight data and cockpit voice recorder and a single "deployable" recorder, or triggered flight data transmission combined with the existing requirements for recorders.

Since dual combined FDR/CVR recorders have already been certified for use on U.S. commercial aircraft and are recognized within the International Civil Aviation Organization standards, can the FAA confirm that its new investigative technologies rulemaking will include formal updates to the Federal Aviation Regulations for the installation and certification of combination FDR/CVR recorder systems?

ANSWER. In NTSB Safety Recommendation A–99–17, the NTSB recommends the FAA require the installation of dual flight data recorders/cockpit voice recorders (FDR/CVR) on newly manufactured aircraft to provide recorder data redundancy. However, a dual FDR/CVR would still require a traditional means of recovery after an incident or accident. The FAA recognizes there are alternate emerging technologies that could meet the intent of timely recovery of flight data without the need

[1] https://www.faa.gov/sites/faa.gov/files/Investigative-Technologies-Interim-Report-January-2025.pdf

for underwater retrieval, per NTSB A–15–3, and has tasked the IT ARC to provide recommendations on this topic, We are waiting for the IT ARC's recommendations, which the FAA will consider as part of the rulemaking process. We expect the IT ARC to submit a recommendation report in August 2025.

Piston Aviation Fuels Initiative (PAFI)

Question 5. What specific steps has the FAA taken in the past 4 months to ensure PAFI's implementation, particularly regarding fleet-wide AVGAS authorization? Additionally, please provide an updated timeline for when stakeholders (i.e. airport operators, FBOs, and general aviation pilots, etc.) can reasonably expect unleaded AVGAS to be widely available at scale across the national airport system, and what intermediate milestones will indicate progress toward this goal.

ANSWER. In the past four-month period, testing has been completed on two of the six PAFI test engines: the Lycoming IO–540–K1A5 and the Continental TSIO–520–VB. This included performance and detonation testing, and sensitivity testing to examine the impacts of various engine and operating conditions, which provides critical data to support the fleet authorization for this fuel.

In addition to the technical progress over the last four-months, there have been several notable programmatic achievements including the addition of seven new partners to the PAFI Technical Advisory Committee, the development and implementation of a master program schedule, and the initiation of contracting actions to support materials compatibility testing, radial engine testing, and flight testing, all of which support the issuing of the fleet authorization.

The projected timeline for the issuance of fleet authorization is March 2027. This is dependent on key milestones in June 2026 for completion of PAFI aircraft flight testing, September 2026 for completion of PAFI engine testing and the materials compatibility assessment, and ASTM production specification approval in December 2026.

In addition to PAFI, the FAA has authorized the use of two other unleaded fuels through the supplemental type certificate process, and these fuels are available at several airports.

QUESTION TO JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. JOHN GARAMENDI

Question 1. Sec. 434 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 modifies language from the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 which required the creation of Employee Assault Prevention and Response plans, which had not been previously implemented. These plans were designed to be a critical tool in combating assaults against passenger service agents, including individuals working at the gate and at check in. Given that these assaults continue, it is important that FAA finally implement this mandate. FAA was required to provide a briefing to Congress on air carrier Employee Assault Prevention and Response Plans 90 days following enactment of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. Has this briefing occurred, and if not, when does FAA plan to hold it? Does FAA believe that it is on track to fully comply with the provisions of Sec 434 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024?

ANSWER. FAA representatives briefed congressional staff on September 27, 2024, fulfilling the requirement to update Congress within 90 days of enactment. At this time, all operators required to submit Employee Assault Prevention and Response Plans under section 551 of Pub. L. 115–254 have completed this requirement and the FAA has accepted the plans.

QUESTION TO JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.

Question 1. The 2024 FAA Reauthorization directs the agency to use its direct hire authorities to bring on more individuals to fill aviation safety and aircraft certification roles. Yet the Trump Administration has fired several federal employees in these critical roles. How is the FAA accounting for the significant loss of institutional safety knowledge because of the Department-wide purge?

ANSWER. President Trump has continuously indicated his support for aviation safety and, with Secretary Duffy, secured an unprecedented investment in the safety of America's aviation infrastructure. President Trump also issued an Executive order on January 20, 2025, directing an immediate assessment of aviation safety

and, on January 21, directed FAA to refocus from non-safety related DEI to safety and merit-based hiring. The FAA under President Trump is focused exclusively on safety.

FAA staff in critical safety-related positions, including aviation safety inspectors and certification safety inspectors, were not eligible to participate in the DRP. Congressional direction for the FAA to use direct-hire authority (e.g., on-the-spot hiring authority) has enabled the FAA to continue targeted recruitment for these mission-critical positions, and it allows the FAA to accept resumes outside of the normal announcement process for all service locations. Use of on-the-spot hiring authority is an effective tool in hiring for these positions. On-the-spot hiring authority will continue to enable the FAA to accelerate the hiring process by extending offers of employment to fully mission-qualified candidates faster in a highly competitive labor market. And, as safety remains the FAA's top priority, we continue to closely monitor onboard staffing levels.

QUESTION TO FRANK MCINTOSH, DEPUTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. DANIEL WEBSTER

Question 1. Mr. McIntosh, what three things can the FAA do to speed up the process to construct a new FAA Airport Traffic Control Tower?

ANSWER. The FAA is exploring a number of actions to speed up the process to construct a new FAA Airport Traffic Control Tower. We are working toward a standard facility design that can be adapted for each location; exploring alternate contracting approaches; and leveraging hiring flexibilities to ensure we have the right engineering expertise.

QUESTION TO FRANK MCINTOSH, DEPUTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. SCOTT PERRY

Question 1. Can you please provide the committee with all the FAA's reports and responses to the February 27, 2025, Memorandum from OPM Acting Director Charles Ezell, Regarding "Agency Reporting to OPM for Fiscal Year 2024 Taxpayer-Funded Union Time Use"?

ANSWER. [Editor's note: See the response on page 99 from Jodi Baker, Deputy Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety, Federal Aviation Administration, to Mr. Perry.]

QUESTIONS TO FRANK MCINTOSH, DEPUTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. VINCE FONG

Question 1. There is a lot of money being spent on developing drones for use by the U.S. military. In some cases the drones are getting larger and going faster, the collaborative combat aircraft program is a great example of this trend.

How will the FAA use its authorities, like section 927, to help speed up innovation and allow more execution in this area of drone testing?

ANSWER. [Editor's note: See the response on page 99 from Jodi Baker, Deputy Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety, Federal Aviation Administration, to Mr. Fong.]

Question 2. The 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act strengthens the role of the FAA's UAS Test Sites to facilitate safe testing of new aviation technologies in the unmanned aircraft space.

While the Act does not explicitly direct using overwater areas, don't you think it would make sense to utilize overwater areas as much as possible with innovative aviation solutions—especially larger, unmanned aircraft? If the aviation industry wishes to utilize overwater test ranges to enhance the safety of their operations, is anything preventing FAA from authorizing flights beyond 12 nautical miles?

ANSWER. [Editor's note: See the response on page 99 from Jodi Baker, Deputy Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety, Federal Aviation Administration, to Mr. Fong.]

QUESTIONS TO FRANK MCINTOSH, DEPUTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. HENRY C. "HANK" JOHNSON, JR.

Question 1. During my initial questioning, I asked about the Administration's deferred resignation buyout offered to FAA Air Traffic Organization (ATO) employees. Although you stated that you were "not aware if they received any", it's been widely reported that air traffic controllers did in fact receive the initial offer beginning on January 28, 2025.[1] Can you clarify how many ATO employees, including air traffic controllers, received the initial deferred resignation buyout offer beginning on January 28, 2025?

ANSWER. The FAA does not have the ability to track whether employees in fact received these emails. However, air traffic controllers were not eligible for the deferred resignation program (DRP).

Question 2. Amid significant backlash, the DOT later clarified that controllers, aviation safety inspectors, and airway transportation systems specialists would not be eligible for the buyout offer.[2] However, prior to this subsequent guidance, how many ATO employees, including air traffic controllers, initially accepted the offer?

ANSWER. Air traffic controllers were not eligible for the DRP and no air traffic controllers were placed on deferred resignation. There were 326 ATO employees who took the DRP in the first round.

Question 3. How many ATO employees have been terminated, placed on administrative leave or have otherwise left the agency since January 20, 2025?

ANSWER. 2,232 as of August 14, 2025. This number includes voluntary separations and retirements.

QUESTIONS TO FRANK MCINTOSH, DEPUTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. PATRICK RYAN

Question 1.a. What are the FAA's immediate plans and timeline to address the technology and data transmission issues for the Newark airspace?

Question 1.b. How quickly will these plans be communicated to stakeholders and implemented?

ANSWER to 1.a. & 1.b. The FAA is prioritizing infrastructure upgrades at critical facilities by addressing legacy systems, improving telecommunications reliability, and ensuring adequate staffing through targeted hiring and retention efforts. The new protected ethernet solution between the New York Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) and Philadelphia (PHL) TRACON Area C will improve resiliency and enable continued services if a line fails. Concurrently, we are working to establish a Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System (STARS) hub at PHL TRACON Area C, which will allow it to operate independently of the New York STARS hub and reduce vulnerability to future telecommunications failures. We continue to provide updates on the FAA website: https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/faa-statements-newark-liberty-international-airport.

Question 2. What are the FAA's plans to address ATC staffing challenges with specific targets, strategies, and timelines for filling vacancies?

ANSWER. Under President Trump's leadership and with Secretary Duffy's support, the FAA is implementing a series of initiatives designed to strengthen our air traffic control workforce and enhance operational efficiency. These measures demonstrate our commitment to addressing staffing challenges while ensuring the continued safety and reliability of our aviation system.

To encourage recruitment, we introduced a 30% salary increase, incentivizing candidates entering the Academy. In addition, we streamlined the hiring process, allowing applicants to progress through necessary steps individually, rather than waiting for larger cohorts. Recognizing the importance of a swift and efficient clearance

---

[1] Thomas Beaumont, Adriana Gomez Licon, Nicholas Riccardi, *Air traffic controllers were initially offered buyouts and told to consider leaving government*, ASSOCIATED PRESS, (Jan. 31, 2025), *available at*: https://apnews.com/article/jet-helicopter-crash-air-traffic-controllers-caee8a1e14eb5d156725581d41e6a809.

[2] Oriana Pawlyk, *Aviation, rail safety at DOT exempt from resignation offer*, POLITICO PRO, (Feb. 13, 2025), *available at*: https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2025/02/aviation-rail-safety-at-dot-exempt-from-resignation-offer-00204061?source=email

process, we are dedicating additional resources to the medical and security phases, ensuring that new controllers can enter service without unnecessary delays. Moreover, we are providing targeted incentives for controllers willing to staff hard-to-fill facilities and retaining experienced professionals by offering competitive benefits to encourage them to remain in the workforce.

We are also deploying technology like Tower Simulation Systems to improve training times once someone is in a facility. These systems have shown to reduce the certification time by 27%.

The FAA expects to see positive changes within the next 18–24 months.

Question 3. When will the FAA devote additional staff and resources to implement modern technology at New York and New Jersey area airports?

ANSWER. The FAA is committed to modernizing technology at New York and New Jersey-area airports and continuously evaluates resource allocation based on evolving priorities, safety considerations, and stakeholder input. We continue to make excellent progress toward upgrading the communications network to create more resilient and redundant communication links to the PHL TRACON, which directs aircraft into and out of Newark. Earlier this summer, we activated a temporary mobile satellite communications system at the PHL TRACON, providing communications redundancy for the TRACON. The new protected ethernet solution between N90 and PHL TRACON Area C will improve resiliency and enable continued services if a line fails.

Concurrently, we are working to establish a Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System (STARS) hub at PHL TRACON Area C, which will allow it to operate independently of the New York STARS hub and reduce vulnerability to future telecommunications failures. This work will continue over the summer.

Question 4. For years, the FAA's funding requests for its facilities and equipment have not kept pace with its air traffic control infrastructure needs. Given what we have seen in the news lately about ATC equipment outages, it is crucial for the FAA to invest in more than just the mere sustainment of its ATC legacy systems. Can the FAA commit to upgrading facilities and equipment to ensure safety in the skies?

ANSWER. The FAA is committed to upgrading facilities and equipment to ensure aviation safety. Secretary Duffy acknowledged the current air traffic control system is outdated and requires significant investment to meet the demands of modern air travel. We recognize the critical need to modernize our air traffic control infrastructure to ensure the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System. President Trump's and Secretary Duffy's proposed modernization plan is a strategic priority for the FAA, and the agency is committed to securing the necessary resources and support to implement these upgrades. While specific timelines are contingent upon congressional approval and funding, the FAA is dedicated to advancing these initiatives to enhance the safety and efficiency of our air traffic control system.

Question 5. Many folks in my district are afraid to fly these days. The downstream impacts of that fear could have real effects on the tourism and transit industries. How can I assure my constituents that they are safe to travel through Newark and that they should continue to trust air travel in the United States?

ANSWER. The Newark Liberty International Airport remains safe to travel to and from. The FAA has approached, and continues to approach, the Newark challenges with solutions from every angle. Since the Newark disruptions earlier this year, the Agency successfully transitioned to a brand-new fiber optic communications network between New York and the PHL TRACON—the facility which manages much of the airspace surrounding Newark. In the longer term, FAA plans to establish a STARS hub at the PHL TRACON to further strengthen operational capabilities.

Maintaining a highly qualified workforce is also critical to FAA's safety mission, including at Newark. The area in the PHL TRACON that manages Newark traffic currently has 20 fully certified controllers, 5 fully certified supervisors, and an additional 29 controllers and supervisors in training. And earlier this year, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy announced a plan to accelerate the hiring of air traffic controllers through process improvements. Thanks to these efforts, the Agency is beginning to see a healthy pipeline of new controllers, with training classes already full well into next year.

QUESTION TO WAYNE HEIBECK, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AIRPORTS, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, FROM HON. SCOTT PERRY

Question 1. Can you please provide the committee with all the FAA's reports and responses to the February 27, 2025, Memorandum from OPM Acting Director Charles Ezell, Regarding "Agency Reporting to OPM for Fiscal Year 2024 Taxpayer-Funded Union Time Use"?

ANSWER. [Editor's note: See the response on page 99 from Jodi Baker, Deputy Associate Administrator for Aviation Safety, Federal Aviation Administration, to Mr. Perry.]

QUESTIONS TO EITHER JODI BAKER, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AVIATION SAFETY, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION; FRANK MCINTOSH, DEPUTY CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, AIR TRAFFIC ORGANIZATION, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION; OR WAYNE HEIBECK, DEPUTY ASSOCIATE ADMINISTRATOR FOR AIRPORTS, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION; FROM HON. ROBERT GARCIA

CVR

Question 1. Since 2018, the National Transportation Safety Board recommended cockpit voice recorders be required to record for 25 hours. Last year's reauthorization bill required a final rule by 2027, with newly manufactured aircraft to have 25-hour recording within one year of enfacement and retrofits for existing aircraft by 2030.

Question 1.a. What is the status of the rulemaking for 25-hour cockpit voice recording?

ANSWER. The FAA is drafting a final rule. The Act requires additional rulemaking to address existing aircraft ("retrofit"), and currently, we expect to meet the timeframe set forth in the Act for this rulemaking.

Question 1.b. How concerned is the FAA with respect to deliberate erasure or tampering of cockpit voice recorders after a reportable event, and what measures will the FAA consider to protect against this occurring?

ANSWER. The FAA takes the integrity and preservation of CVRs very seriously. While FAA regulations establish requirements for the handling and retention of CVR data, it is the responsibility of each operator to include specific guidance in their Flight Operations Manual to ensure flight crews understand that any tampering with CVRs is strictly prohibited. These manuals are subject to review and approval by the Certificate Management Office, which ensures that operator procedures align with regulatory standards and safety expectations.

Question 1.c. In 2017, Air Canada Flight 759 lined up on the taxiway, and did not realize it had narrowly avoided a crash with other aircraft. It flew about 40 hours before Air Canada senior official became aware of the severity of the incident and realized that data from the airplane needed to be retrieved. Will the FAA limit preservation and retrieval to only reportable events under part 830 of title 49, or expand the universe of incidents which could reasonably need investigation due to narrowly avoided accidents?

ANSWER. The 'forward fit' NPRM proposing to increase the CVR recording duration to 25 hours will improve current investigative capabilities and expand the possible range of data available to investigators. However, the rulemaking does not propose to alter or modify existing requirements for preservation and retrieval of CVR data.

Avgas

Question 2. In September 2022, the FAA issued an expanded FAA approved model list STC to GAMI for a 100 octane unleaded fuel (G100UL) for every spark-ignition piston engine in general aviation aircraft. In September 2024, FAA issued Swift Fuels, an STC for Cessna 172R/S Skyhawks with Lycoming IO–360–L2A engines to operate on a high-octane unleaded fuel (100R).

Is the FAA examining Swift Fuel's 100R for additional STCs for other spark-ignition piston general aviation aircraft and what is the status of those STC reviews?

ANSWER. Yes, the FAA is currently examining Swift Fuel's proposals for 100R for additional spark-ignition engines. Swift Fuel is proposing a replacement of their UL94 fuel with 100R fuel for 94 grade octane certified engines. The FAA is considering this replacement based on a similar rationale from the applicant and other possible testing requirements.

Question 3. Under the Piston Aviation Fuels Initiative (PAFI), the FAA is currently working with the LyondellBasell/VP Racing team to test and evaluate its high-octane unleaded candidate fuel solution (UL 100E). We have heard that PAFI's normal operating procedure has been to utilize credit cards for testing as this process is very narrowly tailored to a specific fuel. When the current Administration froze all credit card expenditures, the only solution to procure necessary item is the standard procurement process, which is onerous.

Question 3.a. Are credit card procedures delaying purchase of unleaded aviation gas fuels for testing in the PAFI process? If so, how is the FAA working to ensure timely testing of PAFI fuel candidates?

ANSWER. No. The PAFI program is exempt from Executive Order (EO) 14222, *Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Cost Efficiency Initiative*, which froze all purchase card activity for 30 days effective February 26, 2025. The PAFI program, exempt from restricted purchases during this time, underwent a series of process adjustments to ensure compliance with the EO, including increasing cardholder spending limits to prevent delays.

Question 3.b. What is the status of PAFI testing of LyondellBasell/VP Racing team (UL 100E), and what is the current timeline for FAA approval?

ANSWER. PAFI testing is approximately 35% complete (up-to-date details are available at http://www.flyeagle.org). The current schedule for the program is targeting March 31, 2027, as the estimated completion date for fleet authorization.

○