

DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION, AND HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR 2026

HEARINGS

BEFORE A
SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION

SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE DEPARTMENTS OF TRANSPORTATION, AND
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

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Printed for the use of the Committee on Appropriations

U.S. GOVERNMENT PUBLISHING OFFICE

61-854

WASHINGTON : 2026

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**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION, AND
HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND
RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS FOR
2026**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26, 2025.

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

WITNESS

**HON. JENNIFER HOMENDY, CHAIR, NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION
SAFETY BOARD**

Mr. WOMACK. The subcommittee will come to order. Want to thank all of you for joining us at this first hearing of the 119th Congress for the Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development. It doesn't go unnoticed that today is the 1-year anniversary of the collapse of the Key Bridge and we will talk a little bit more about that subject in the course of this hearing. Many other things have happened that are under the jurisdiction of the NTSB that are also noteworthy and of recent importance.

I want to recognize a couple of new faces on the dais this year. I want to welcome Ms. Stephanie Bice, Vice Chair of the subcommittee, from the great state of Oklahoma. And Alabama's Dale Strong. He is yet to arrive. I would also note that Mr. Jim Clyburn, my ranking member, and Chair Emeritus and Dean of the House Mr. Hal Rogers are expected to join us for the subcommittee today. Albeit when they last served on this subcommittee together, we were solely tasked with the T part of THUD.

Today, we welcome Chairwoman of the National Transportation Safety Board Jennifer Homendy to the subcommittee. Ms. Homendy, welcome. I want to thank you for appearing before us today and for your service to the taxpaying public.

I want to start off by expressing on behalf of the entire subcommittee our heartfelt condolences to the families affected by the tragic American Airlines army helicopter collision back on January 29th. This tragedy has been followed by several other incidents, from crashes in Philadelphia and Nome, Alaska, to the engine fire in Denver 2 weeks ago. Transportation safety has been top of mind across the Nation as we look for answers and aim to mitigate the chances of future such incidents.

Safety is a top priority for the subcommittee. In our work to fund the Nation's transportation network, it is our duty to ensure we provide appropriate levels of support to transportation programs that ensure the safety of our skies, roads, and railroads. It is also our duty on this subcommittee to support the operations of the Na-

tional Transportation Safety Board, or NTSB. This critical independent safety watchdog helps ensure our world-class transportation system is as safe as possible, identifying the how and why of some of our most tragic accidents and puzzling events in civil transportation.

We are proud on this subcommittee to provide the resources necessary for Chair Homendy and her team to execute this mission. Most recently, I was proud to secure an anomaly to the FY 25 full-year continuing resolution to help provide Chair Homendy with the necessary resources for her team to accomplish their statutory mission. Be it the Key Bridge that we talked about earlier, the East Palestine train derailment or the aviation incidents that have occurred far too often in recent years, Chair Homendy's team are some of the first on the scene. In 2025, we secured a 3.6 percent increase for the NTSB appropriation to \$145 million. We know, Chair Homendy, that you put these funds to good use. Under your leadership, the NTSB has dramatically reduced the average age of open investigations, getting reports out to the public faster.

With that, it would be appropriate to recognize when he gets here the ranking member of the subcommittee, the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Clyburn. In the absence of that, however, I am going to recognize the chairman of the full committee of the House Appropriations Committee, my good friend from the great state of Oklahoma, Tom Cole.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Chairman Womack, and thank you when he arrives to Ranking Member Clyburn. It is always good to be with my good friend, the ranking member of the full committee. So happy to see you again. And Chair Homendy, thank you very much for appearing before us today.

Our Nation's transportation systems are relied on by Americans and passengers from across the globe. We not only expect but demand that they reflect the gold standard and safety. Yet recent accidents in our skies, waterways and railways have raised serious concerns and questions. From the midair collision at Reagan Washington National Airport which my friend the chairman referred to, the Francis Scott Key Bridge collision, these tragedies have brought devastating loss and underscored the need to ensure these situations are never repeated. The bottom line is when you get on a plane, drive over a bridge or board a train, you shouldn't have to wonder if you will make it to your destination safely.

The mission of Chair Homendy and her team at the National Transportation Safety Board is essential to achieving that objective. They investigate why an accident occurred and identify measures to prevent it from happening again. They don't speculate. They find the facts necessary to uphold the highest standards of reliability and safety. It is for these objectives of improving safety and saving lives that we have prioritized increased resources for the NTSB in our FY 25 and FY 24 funding measures.

During my time on this subcommittee, I secured an 8.2 percent increase to your funding, and I must say, you put it to very good use. So you are an excellent steward of public money, and I am very pleased that my friend the chairman built that into 2025. Again, I greatly value our interactions and working together, Chair Homendy, and I look forward to a continued engagement.

This subcommittee, as it always has under both Democratic and Republican stewardship, will continue to ensure safety is an utmost priority in the funding decisions we make. Your agency is a fulfillment of that priority. As we begin the FY '26 appropriations process, I look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to responsibly fund this critical safety mission and transportation infrastructure needs of the country.

So thank you Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Cole.

And now it is my great honor and privilege to welcome the ranking member of the full committee, the gentlelady from Connecticut, Ms. DeLauro. The floor is yours.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. It is great to be with you here this morning and with the chairman, who is a dear friend, and I appreciate the opportunity to be here at this hearing. And I want to say a thank you to Chair Homendy. Really, welcome to the committee. It is an important and very, very important hearing today. It is a topic that impacts every one of our districts safety and the security of our Nation's transportation systems, and it does come in the wake of several heartbreaking and deeply concerning tragedies in our Nation's skies. In addition to that, what happened with the Key Bridge as well as in our skies as well as involving American Carrier at Toronto's Pearson—Pearson Airport.

Just let me just say a word. I have always so admired the NTSB to the point of I view that I spend a lot of time in the food safety area, and we have 15 agencies at the Federal level that deal deal with our food safety; two primarily are the FDA and the USDA. And wanting to have—I have for years and years and years have wanted to consolidate and have one single food safety agency. The example I always use is the NTSB because when something happens, you go in, you get the facts, and then you tell us what happened and you make your recommendations instead of a whole bunch of agencies pointing fingers at one another. So thank you really for the strength of this agency.

You are a small agency but with a tremendously important mission; investigate, help Congress and the American people understand how and why aviation and other transportation disasters happen. The independence of the NTSB is critical to its mission. We cannot tolerate any outside pressure, political or otherwise, to influence the investigation of and the reporting on transportation incidents. However, broadly speaking, the current administration has shown limited respect for the independence of the agencies. I would like to know how we can continue to advocate the agency's independence in support of the NTSB's fact-finding and reporting abilities to Congress.

Unfortunately, after 17 years without a fatal accident involving a U.S. carrier, 67 lives were lost in the Potomac River earlier this year when a PSA Airlines flight operating for American Eagle collided with a U.S. Army helicopter just seconds before attempting to land at Washington's National Airport. Two nights later, a MEDEVAC flight crashed into a populated area of Philadelphia, taking the lives of all on board and one person on the ground. And

then in February, a Cessna Caravan crashed in Alaska, leaving no survivors.

With recent reports of near-miss incidents and runway incursions, the American people are deeply concerned about the safety of our aviation system. While we need to assure the American people that our commercial aviation system is the safest and the most reliable air system in the world, I am concerned with how the administration is approaching aviation safety and the conflicts of interest involved in billionaire Elon Musk pursuing the FAA to contract his own Starlink service rather than engaging in a thorough safety-driven analysis.

Cuts and decisions at FAA are out of your jurisdiction and beyond the purview of this hearing, but I do want to discuss how this administration has responded to recent incidents. NTSB'S fact-finding abilities are helped by long standing policies and an industry culture that encourages flight crew members and air traffic controllers to report any and all incidents that take place. Rather than placing blame before we know the facts, we need airspace operators to feel comfortable compelled to self-report any incidents and diversions from procedures that take place.

However, in the immediate aftermath of the Potomac crash, we saw the President, the Vice President, and the Secretary of Defense blaming "DEI" as the reason for the crash before any facts were known. We cannot afford to put the cart before the horse when it comes to aviation safety. We cannot lay blame on pilots or air traffic controllers or any other personnel until after the NTSB uncovers and reports on the facts and the preliminary report showed no role for DEI. It is follow the facts. That is all we are asking. We cannot overstate the critical importance your agency plays in keeping our families, our colleagues and our fellow Americans safe. I know you have a deep awareness of this, and I hope you will do whatever is necessary to protect and defend NTSB's authorities and prerogatives when it comes to transportation safety.

Finally, I would like to know how working with agencies such as the Department of Transportation, who are operating under a continuing resolution rather than a full-year funding bill that addresses current and near-future needs, affects your collaborative work, ongoing investigations, and the need to close out thousands of transportation safety recommendations in general.

I wish that we had been able to finish the job on the 2000 on Fiscal Year 2025 funding bills. We were on the brink of a bipartisan agreement between the four corners of the appropriations committees when the House majority decided to upend the process and pursue a partisan bill that does not fully meet the needs of any department or agency across the government and that, instead, have handed a blank check, in my view, to Elon Musk and to President Trump. I implore this committee to get back on track to work towards bipartisan consensus for this subcommittee's bill and the rest of the appropriations bills for 2026.

Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. I thank the gentlelady.

The ranking member of the subcommittee has arrived and has informed me that he will waive his opening statement, and we will go to questions here a little bit later on.

With that, Chair Homendy, we turn to you now for your opening statement. Your full written statement will also be included for the record. The Chair now recognizes you for 5 minutes.

STATEMENT OF HON. JENNIFER HOMENDY

Ms. HOMENDY. Thank you and good morning, Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and members of the subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide an overview of the NTSB's activities.

I also want to recognize that it was a year ago today that I got the call shortly after 1:29 a.m. about the collision of the Dali with the Key Bridge and the fatally injured six construction crew members on the bridge as well as two serious injuries, one on the Dali and one on the bridge. And our deepest condolences, I want to offer for the families and all the loved ones for this tragic event, and our thoughts and prayers continue to go out to you as we pursue this investigation.

I want to start by thanking you for your incredible support of the NTSB and our critical safety mission, including the increase in our FY '25 funding to \$145 million in the CR. The funding you provided is necessary to support the staffing, training, and technology we need to maintain our reputation across the globe as the gold standard in accident investigations. With your support we will be able to increase our agency size to 450 onboards. It is currently 427, which I can talk about. That would bring us closer to truly full staffing of about 500 personnel. The fact is the NTSB has hovered around 400 personnel over the past 3 decades. We need to grow to improve performance, meet increasing demands, and keep pace with emerging challenges.

As you know, the NTSB is an independent agency charged with investigating and establishing the facts, circumstances, and probable cause of accidents and serious incidents in the U.S. in all modes of transportation. We also serve as the United States accredited representative under international treaty and lead the U.S.'s response to the investigation of hundreds of accidents that occur overseas annually. The NTSB also delivers a Family Assistance Program, which focuses on facilitating the recovery and identification of fatally injured passengers involved in the accidents we investigate and communicating with families throughout the course of our investigations.

Our current investigative workload includes almost 1,250 accident—active investigations in all 50 states, including Puerto Rico, including in many of your districts. In addition to supporting more than 160 foreign investigations in over 50 countries. Throughout a typical year, we work on about 2,200 domestic and 450 foreign cases, and we expect the number of cases annually to remain high and continue to increase in complexity.

I want to take a few moments to provide updates on two of our major investigations. Earlier this month we issued a preliminary report and urgent safety recommendations to the FAA in response to the midair collision at DCA. I want to commend Secretary Duffy for his swift acceptance of these recommendations. The Secretary and the acting administrator of the FAA have been tremendous

partners throughout the course of this investigation and in many others, and I want to thank them for their focus on safety.

Just last week, as part of our ongoing investigation of the Dali collision with the Key Bridge, we issued urgent safety recommendations to 30 owners of 68 bridges, which I also can discuss. There is still much work to be done in both of these investigations and we'll keep this committee updated on our progress.

Some investigations understandably get more public attention than others, but all of our investigations are critical for improving transportation safety. We owe it to the families of those involved, to the communities where accidents occurred, and to the traveling public to find out what happened, why it happened, to prevent it from happening again.

In 2024, we issued 132 new safety recommendations across all modes of transportation, nearly 60 percent of which have already been implemented voluntarily by the recommendation recipients. This success rate demonstrates the value of our safety recommendations and our work with stakeholders to improve safety. And I think this is an important point that I want to emphasize. The NTSB doesn't regulate. We don't want to. The NTSB doesn't have enforcement authority. We don't want it. Why? Because our singular focus is on saving lives and almost all of our safety recommendations we issue are dependent on voluntary action of the recipients. In other words, it is a true partnership on safety.

Chairman Womack, you once said that we punch above our weight. That is true. We run lean with a highly skilled, highly valued workforce, many of whom are here today or watching online. To them I say I could not be more proud of you. It is an absolute honor, a privilege, to serve you and the American people each and every day.

I want to thank you for having me, and I look forward to answering your questions. And I will just note that Vice Chairman Brown is here today as well.

[The information follows:]



Testimony of

Jennifer Homendy
Chairwoman
National Transportation Safety Board

Before the

Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development, and
Related Agencies

US House of Representatives

– On –

Oversight Hearing - National Transportation Safety Board

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Washington, DC • March 26, 2025



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Good morning, Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Jennifer Homendy, and I am honored to serve as Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide an update regarding the NTSB's activities.

I want to begin by thanking you for your incredible support of the NTSB and its workforce and our ability to carry out our vital safety mission by increasing our FY25 funding level to \$145 million in the Continuing Resolution (CR).

As you know, the NTSB is an independent federal agency charged by Congress with investigating and establishing the facts, circumstances, and cause or probable cause of all civil aviation accidents and serious incidents in the United States and defined accidents in all other modes of transportation, including roadway accidents, grade crossing incidents, railroad accidents, pipeline accidents, major marine casualties occurring on or under the navigable waters, internal waters, or the territorial sea of the United States, and other accidents related to the transportation of individuals or property when the Board decides the accident is catastrophic, the accident involves problems of a recurring character, or the investigation of the accident would carry out our statutory requirements.¹ In addition, the NTSB carries out special studies concerning transportation safety and coordinates the resources of the federal government and other organizations to aid victims and their family members impacted by major transportation disasters.

Our current investigative workload includes almost 1,250 active investigations in all 50 states and Puerto Rico, in addition to supporting more than 160 foreign investigations in over 50 countries. Throughout a typical year, we work on about 2,200 domestic and 450 foreign cases, and we expect the number of cases annually to remain high and continue to increase in complexity.

Our most recent major investigations include the February 3, 2023, Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio; the November 14, 2023, fatal collision

¹ In addition, current law also requires us to, among other things, maintain a 24-hour response operations center; deliver a family assistance program, which includes facilitating the recovery and identification of fatally injured passengers involved in accidents we investigate and communicating with the families of passengers involved in accidents throughout our investigations; formulate safety recommendations based on our accidents; develop and issue written reports of each accident we investigate within two years of the date of the accident; ensure public availability and disclosure of information related to our investigations; maintain certain electronic systems, including the public docket system and the multimodal accident database management system; maintain a Chief Data Officer, a Chief Financial Officer, a Chief Information Officer, a Performance Improvement Officer, and an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Director; govern all proceedings on appeals taken from decisions of the Federal Aviation Administration Administrator and U.S. Coast Guard Commandant sustaining orders of an administrative law judge, revoking, suspending, or denying a license, certificate, document, or register in defined proceedings; conduct strategic and workforce planning; establish budgets; conduct certain enforcement proceedings (specific to family assistance); implement the Occupational Safety and Health Act, Freedom of Information Act, and EEO legal requirements; and much more.

of a commercial motor vehicle with a passenger vehicle and bus carrying high school students and their chaperones near Etna, Ohio; the November 16, 2023, Chicago Transit Authority collision with a snow removal machine; the January 5, 2024, in-flight structural failure of a Boeing 737-9 MAX over Portland, Oregon while on its way to Ontario, California; the March 26, 2024, contact of the container ship *Dali* with the Francis Scott Key Bridge, and subsequent bridge collapse, in Baltimore, Maryland; and the January 29, 2025, midair collision between a PSA Airlines Bombardier CRJ700 Airplane (operated as American Airlines flight 5342) and a Sikorsky H-60 US Army helicopter (operating under the callsign PAT25) in Washington, DC.

Flight 5342 was a scheduled domestic passenger flight operating under the provisions of 14 *Code of Federal Regulations* Part 121 from Wichita Dwight D. Eisenhower National Airport (ICT), Wichita, Kansas, to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). The Army helicopter originated from Davison Army Airfield, at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, and was conducting an annual check ride flight with night-vision goggles for the co-pilot.

Flight 5342 departed ICT at 5:39pm central standard time. At 8:43pm eastern standard time (EST), flight 5342 contacted DCA tower and checked in for visual approach to runway 1. The local controller (LC) asked if flight 5342 could accept runway 33. Flight 5342's crew accepted runway 33 for landing, at which time PAT25 was traveling southbound, operating under visual flight rules, along the Potomac River. At about 8:47pm EST, the LC instructed PAT25 to pass behind flight 5342 and issued a traffic advisory. PAT25 reported "traffic in sight" and that it would maintain visual separation. The collision occurred about 8:48pm while flight 5342 was on final approach to land on runway 33.

That collision over the Potomac River in Washington, DC, resulted in the loss of 67 lives – the 2 pilots, 2 flight attendants, and 60 passengers aboard the airplane and all 3 crew members aboard the helicopter.

We have already issued a preliminary report and urgent recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). I again want to commend the Secretary of Transportation – Secretary Duffy – and the Federal Aviation Administration for its swift acceptance of these recommendations. There is still much work to be done in this investigation, and we will keep this Committee updated on our progress.

Two nights later, on January 31, 2025, a Learjet 55 operating as a medevac flight crashed into a commercial and residential area shortly after takeoff from Northeast Philadelphia Airport in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The two pilots, two medical crewmembers, and two passengers were fatally injured. One person on the ground was fatally injured, 4 people were seriously injured, and 20 people incurred minor injuries.

Less than a week later, on February 6, 2025, a Bering Air Cessna 208B Grand Caravan disappeared from radar while en route from Unalakleet to Nome, Alaska, and

was found crashed on a large floating icepack. The pilot and nine passengers were fatally injured.

Earlier this month, on March 10, 2025, Air Care 3, a Eurocopter Deutschland GMBH EC135 P2+, crashed into a heavily wooded swamp near the Ross R. Barnett Reservoir in Madison, Mississippi. The helicopter was destroyed by a postimpact fire. The pilot and 2 crewmembers were fatally injured.

Combined, over 70 NTSB investigative, family assistance, and other support staff have launched to the scenes of these tragic accidents, and more are working in our laboratories and at headquarters to support the NTSB response.

Additionally, the NTSB serves as the United States' Accredited Representative under international treaty, *Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation*, which means we lead the United States' response to the investigation of hundreds of accidents that occur overseas annually. These include our most recent support to the Korean Aviation and Railway Accident Investigation Board (ARAIB) in its investigation of Jeju Air flight 2216, which resulted in 179 fatalities, as well as the October 29, 2018, crash of Lion Air Flight 510 which crashed in the Java Sea, resulting in 189 fatalities, and the March 10, 2019, crash of Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302 near Addis Ababa Bole International Airport in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, resulting in 157 fatalities. On January 27, the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire delegated the investigation of the January 24, 2025, accident involving United Airlines flight 613 enroute from Lagos, Nigeria, to Washington Dulles International Airport to the NTSB.

Some investigations, understandably, get more public attention than others, but all of our investigations are critical for improving transportation safety. We know that we owe it to the families of those involved, to the communities where events occurred, and to the traveling public to find out what happened, how and why it happened, and to make recommendations to help ensure it never happens again. Some of our other significant ongoing investigations include the following:

- A multivehicle crash on the Ohio Turnpike in Swanton, Ohio.
- A multivehicle crash between a motorcoach and tractor-trailers parked along a rest area ramp in Highland, Illinois.
- A tanker truck rollover and rupture with anhydrous ammonia release in Teutopolis, Illinois.
- A hot air balloon accident in Eloy, Arizona.
- A collision between two New York City Transit trains near the 96th Street station in Manhattan.
- Three marine accidents that occurred on the Cooper River in Charleston, South Carolina.
- A grade-crossing collision in Pecos, Texas.
- A collision involving a vehicle operating with partial driving automation in San Antonio, Texas.

- A collision between two vehicles resulting in a postcrash fire in Carrizo Springs, Texas.
- A rail employee fatality in Decatur, Alabama, and other employee fatalities in Arkansas, Illinois, New Jersey, New York, and Wisconsin.
- A natural gas-fueled building explosion in Youngstown, Ohio.
- A fire aboard a dredging vessel in Jacksonville, Florida, resulting in a crewmember fatality.
- A fire aboard a container ship at Port of Newark, New Jersey.
- A midair collision between two airplanes in Marana, Arizona.

In addition, over the last 2 years, we have completed many significant and complex investigations and issued safety recommendations in all modes to prevent tragedies similar to those I mentioned. These completed investigations responded to tragedies that occurred in some of your states or that involved your constituents, such as the following:

- A mid-air collision during the Commemorative Air Force's Wings Over Dallas air show in Dallas, Texas.
- A truck collision with a group of bicyclists in Goodyear, Arizona.
- A highway crash in Tishomingo, Oklahoma resulting in fatal injuries to six teenagers.
- A fire on a battery electric transit bus in Hamden, Connecticut.
- An anchor strike resulting in a leak from an underground pipeline near Huntington Beach, California.
- A pipeline rupture and crude oil release in Edwardsville, Illinois.
- A grade-crossing collision between a Metra commuter train and a box truck in Clarendon Hills, Illinois.
- Rail and transit employee fatalities in Texas, Ohio, New Jersey, Alabama, and Illinois.
- An Amtrak train (*Empire Builder*) derailment in Joplin, Montana.
- A natural gas-fuel explosion and fire in Coolidge, Arizona.
- A multivehicle collision in Phoenix, Arizona.

We currently have over a thousand open safety recommendations across all modes as a result of our investigations. In 2024, we issued 132 new safety recommendations and closed 86. Of those closed, excluding those that were classified reconsidered, no longer applicable, and superseded, 58 (77 percent) were closed acceptably, meaning that the recommendation recipient took action to implement the safety recommendation. This includes actions to enhance aviation safety by requiring operators to implement safety management systems, increase focus on highway bridge maintenance, help prevent damage to underwater pipelines, and help prevent train derailments due to unexpected weather conditions. This success rate demonstrates the value of our recommendations and our work with stakeholders, including parties to our investigations, to improve safety. Our recommendations are meaningful, and we

appreciate recipients' efforts to address them.

The NTSB is a small agency that plays a vital role in ensuring public safety and protection of life and property in all that we do. I appreciate the need to right-size the federal workforce; in fact, I strongly agree with that goal. However, the NTSB runs lean; we always have. We have just 430 employees to carry out our mission and are authorized by Congress to go up to 450, though we would need significantly more than that to truly be fully staffed. To quote Chairman Womack, we punch far above our weight. Everyone at the NTSB plays a role in achieving our mission to make transportation safer. Their hard work, professionalism, and dedication is the reason that the NTSB is regarded as the world's preeminent safety agency. To complete our investigations and develop recommendations that advance safety changes without delays, we must meet the challenges that come with increasing growth and innovation in transportation. Therefore, it is critical for the agency to have additional resources to respond to events without affecting our timeliness, the quality of our work, or our independence.

I want to thank the committee for your support to increase the NTSB's funding over the last 3 years. As a result of that support, we have been able to make much needed progress in hiring for the agency. The vast majority of that growth has been in our investigative offices (Aviation Safety, Highway Safety, Marine Safety, and Railroad, Pipeline, and Hazardous Materials Investigations). Still, despite those efforts, we continue to need additional investigative staff, as well as staff in the operational offices where increases have not occurred to the same extent. This includes staff in General Counsel to work through a backlog of petitions for reconsideration of investigations and airman, mechanic or mariner's certificate appeals, as well as party-related issues and external legal disputes; staff in the Office of the Managing Director to enhance the agency's overall use of data to improve the NTSB's effectiveness and innovation; staff in the Office of the Chief Information Officer to address mandated cybersecurity enhancements and the backlog of Freedom of Information Act requests; and staff in Human Capital and Training to support recruitment, hiring, and other actions critical to developing and retaining a highly-productive workforce.

The fact is, our greatest asset is our workforce, which accounts for over 70 percent of our costs. We rely on a staff of highly skilled individuals with technical expertise in such areas as mechanical engineering, chemistry, and human performance to conduct accident investigations and identify life-saving safety improvements. We must continue to attract and retain talent with expertise in emerging technologies and the transportation systems of tomorrow. And without our workforce, we will not be able to carry out our congressionally mandated mission to protect public safety. Our workforce is highly technical, and approximately 25 percent of the employees are retirement eligible within 1 year; this number increases to approximately 40 percent over the next 5 years. We need to build a deeper bench *now* to prepare for upcoming attrition.

For the NTSB to carry out its mission-critical work, we must have a fully trained workforce ready to respond to more than 1300 new accidents per year, 24 hours a day,

7 days a week, and deliver comprehensive, timely, and concise investigation outcomes and safety recommendations to protect life and property and prevent future transportation-related accidents and injuries from occurring.

The funding you are providing for FY25 is necessary to adequately support the staffing, training, and technology we need to maintain the world's gold standard in transportation safety investigations. In addition to various governmentwide mandates, the 2024 NTSB reauthorization also included several mandates that we will have to pay for over the next 2 years, including extensive digitization of paper and microfiche records, implementation of a drug-testing program for employees, and assessments of accessibility barriers at our agency offices. To maintain US leadership, NTSB must keep pace with industry, emerging technologies, the Department of Transportation, the Coast Guard, and other countries. Simply put, we need more people, more training, and more technology. Funding that only keeps pace with inflation will be a detriment to our efforts to right-size the NTSB and maintain the world's gold standard in service to the travelling public.

In addition to meeting the mandates outlined above, with the \$145 million Congress has appropriated NTSB for FY25, we will be able to increase our agency size to 450 onboards, bringing us closer to truly full staffing. We will invest in developing further expertise in emerging technologies, and we will also modernize our own internal IT environment to enable efficient transportation investigations and better protect against increasingly sophisticated malicious cyber-attacks.

As you consider the NTSB's appropriations for FY26, I respectfully request that Congress support our ability to carry out our critical safety mission now and in the future; to recruit, retain, and develop a highly qualified and specialized workforce; and to prepare the agency for investigations involving emerging transportation technologies and systems to improve transportation safety.

Mr. WOMACK. Fantastic. Well, we are delighted you are here and grateful for the leadership that you give this organization and the American people.

Having said that, recognizing that they have a lot of other important things that they need to do, the ranking member and myself are going to delay our questions so that we can go straight to the overall chairman of the appropriations committee and then the overall ranking member of the appropriations committee, get their questions out of the way so they can go about their business, and being respectful of their time. And also understanding I know who I work for.

So with that said, I am going to recognize my good friend again from Oklahoma, Mr. Cole.

The CHAIRMAN. You also know how to get our nose out of your business as fast as you can, too. It is a pleasure to be back here and couldn't be prouder of this committee on both sides of the aisle, and particularly this chairman, but also your agency. We really, really do appreciate you being there in really difficult times and helping us understand what happened and making sure it doesn't happen again.

Toward that end, and you touched on some of this in your testimony, and I know we don't have a final report yet on the Francis Scott Key Bridge incident, but I think you released recently that there were a couple of electrical outages on the Dali as it approached the bridge. And I am curious if you can tell us at this point, number one, how did you detect that? Just out of curiosity for myself. But is this common on vessels like this, or was this a sign perhaps of negligence on the part of the crew?

Ms. HOMENDY. That is part of our investigation that we are still looking into. There were two electrical outages and then there were electrical outages the day before. We determined those were unrelated and announced that in our preliminary report the day before it was due to planned maintenance. And that is not something that they would undertake underway in transit. But the electrical outages themselves, we are still looking into. That is part of our investigation. I do want to thank some of our partners at Hyundai for coming to help us. We got down to the component, subcomponent level and were on the Dali for about a month with our team. So that does continue. And then we also have the bridge team focused on the bridge itself and safety.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there anything about the bridge you can tell us at this point?

Ms. HOMENDY. So for the bridge itself, while it passed annual inspections, which really focus on the condition of the bridge, what we did is AASHTO, the state highway transportation officials, recommended in 1991 and again in 2009 that bridge owners conduct a vulnerability assessment of their bridges to determine if there is risk and to evaluate that risk and take action if warranted. That did not occur for the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

And so we had asked MDTA if they had done the vulnerability assessment. They had not done it. And we looked for data for that vulnerability assessment. They didn't have the data, so we had to get the data over the course of it usually takes about a year to do these vulnerability assessments. We did it in 6 months. We got a

ton of data and then ran the calculations. And what we found was that the bridge was almost 30 times greater than the risk threshold that AASHTO sets for critical bridges. And the Pier 17, which was struck by the Dali, was almost 15 times greater. So we recommended as a result of that that 30 bridge owners of 68 bridges conduct a vulnerability assessment to determine risk and, if warranted, take immediate action.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much for that. Let me turn quickly. We have obviously had some incidents in our air travel that are concerning to all of us. And you have made several recommendations over the past decade, frankly, regarding the Aviation Safety Management System, or SMS. While the FAA, I am told, has implemented requirements for major airlines, we continue to see delays and extending some of these requirements to other aviation sectors, including manufacturers, maintenance facilities, smaller operations. Which of your specific recommendations do you think would be most important to apply across the board to ensure the maximum safety for the flying public?

Ms. HOMENDY. Well, for SMS in particular, which you stated, we have recommendations on SMS across all modes of transportation. But in aviation in particular, the focus has been on commercial aviation, and the commercial airlines have had SMS since 2015. But it has been a very piecemeal approach across the aviation industry. For aviation manufacturers, there was a final rule issued in May of 2024, and that doesn't go into effect until 2027.

So Boeing, for example, is in the early stages of implementing that, but it is in the very early stages. For other sectors, Part 135, that is the charter and air taxis, they began the process of SMS at FAA, but that hasn't been finalized. Maintenance facilities, there is no requirement for that. Part 91, which are the air tours, also do not have requirements for safety management systems. It should be one level of safety for passengers. That is what we believe, and the piecemeal approach isn't working.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Cole.

Now the ranking member of the full committee, Ms. DeLauro.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And let me just follow up a bit on the—the findings that the 30 owners of the 68 bridges and the potential risks there. And I will have more questions for the USDOT about their work to address your key findings.

I think it is critical to underline the important state-federal partnerships at work here. That includes collaboration by the board, USDOT and other Federal agencies and state departments of transportation. What more can this committee do to make sure that we are supporting the collaboration and improving our oversight of these specific bridges? And there are a number of members here who have, you know, key bridges.

Ms. HOMENDY. Yeah. For bridges itself—and a lot came out since our preliminary report, including a report from Johns Hopkins, and then we had a report on infrastructure showing bridges got a C rating. It is not a matter of if. It is a matter of when something happens. Vessel collisions happen all the time with bridges. And we have to take proactive measures to ensure safety whether it is the

Federal Highways Administration and partners with the bridge own.

In this case for hardening bridges, it could be anything from dolphins, it could be Fender systems. After our investigation of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge in Tampa, Florida, in 1980, they made substantial improvements to their bridges. But that was also a vessel collision with a collapse, and 35 people died. There were a lot of lessons learned there. And as a result of that investigation, a lot of improvements came. But now these bridge owners need to ensure that they are safe.

Ms. DELAURO. I just would say I think it would be helpful if we could understand or make recommendations as it has to do with state Departments of Transportation. In other words, to prevent rather than to react when something is as significant as the loss of lives. You know, here are the 35, you know, and so I think that that that focus would be—would be helpful.

Ms. HOMENDY. And a lot of our recommendations for these bridge owners, a lot of them are either in some cases the Federal Government, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, in other cases, state Departments of Transportation.

Ms. DELAURO. Well, let me get—get to that question. I want to hear about more about your experience with Federal agencies, including obviously the U.S. Department of Transportation at this time.

We have seen a termination of employees in the agencies. For DOT, 790 employees terminated; 340 were from the FAA, 170 from Federal Highway Administration. More than 20 employees terminated from DOT's Office of the Inspector General, which we all know is a watchdog for waste, fraud, and abuse and who has had a hand in transportation as well. Although the majority of the investigations are conducted by the NTSB staff, you have to call on the expertise of other Federal agencies to deal with fact-finding efforts, making recommendations to agencies such as DOT as well as the, as you referenced, the Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Coast Guard.

What are some of the tradeoffs that you see with these agencies during times of uncertainty where field and regional staffing become strained and operations may become overall unpredictable? Are you concerned about our ability to close out the thousands of transportation safety recommendations, as there is, in my view, an indiscriminate approach to cutting the Federal workforce?

Ms. HOMENDY. It would be difficult for me, as the chair of the NTSB, to understand the positions of these individuals for the Department of Transportation. We have 427 employees and I will say that we didn't lose one probationary employee. We got hiring exemptions from the administration. We got an exemption from deferred resignation program. We got tremendous support, and we continue to get support from the administration and as a result of the hard work of our workforce. So we have not experienced any of that, and I have maintained our workforce.

Ms. DELAURO. I would love to, because you know my time will run out shortly, but want to understand what this means in terms of your relationships with the other agencies with which you need to do business, to get information, et cetera, where you haven't had

that experience of the—of the laying off of employees other agencies have, which you directly relate to, which may have an impact.

The other piece of this is whether or not, whether or not you are prepared, you have an authorized level of funding, but no one could foresee some of these efforts which have happened. I would very much like to know what this means in terms of the resources that NTSB needs in order to be able to address the significant issues that have come your way. They weren't planned, but they have come your way, and how you are going to be able to deal with it. That would be important for us to know.

Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, gentlelady from Connecticut.

Chair Homendy, you mentioned in your testimony that it is your mission to basically advise, take data from serious incidents, and then make recommendations, though you have no authority to implement those. You have no authority to enforce such a recommendation. So let's go back to the midair collision that happened back on January 29th. It involved a helicopter, and we had, up to that point, had a lot of helicopter traffic up and down the Potomac and particularly on what we now know as Route 4. But there had been recommendations, I am assuming, made previously about the combination of helicopter traffic and passenger jet service flying into and out of Reagan National Airport. Had there been recommendations on helicopter traffic, specifically with regard to Route 4, which is right across the Potomac?

Ms. HOMENDY. We had not issued any recommendations regarding Route 4, but certainly as part of this investigation, that is one of our big focus.

Mr. WOMACK. So when you did your investigation, there were some pretty alarming conclusions made. Perhaps most alarming to me was the number of times, and I think this went back to like 2021; I can't remember, but 4 or 5 years, that the number of times where the separation horizontally and the separation vertically was very dangerous. As I understand it, in vertical separation, less than 75 feet. So can you speak to the conclusions that your team has come up with in researching serious incidents prior to?

Ms. HOMENDY. Yes, and what we did is we looked at FAA surveillance data and then voluntary reporting system data. So that is reporting from pilots, reporting from air traffic control. Those are voluntary reporting systems. And then there is a mandatory reporting system for occurrences in air traffic control. And what the data showed us is that there were 15,214 close proximity events from 2021 through 2024 at DCA between helicopters and planes.

Mr. WOMACK. When Federal agencies respond to your recommendations, across the spectrum of them, not just particularly this case, what are the hesitations involved, because I am assuming they don't accept all the recommendations, they don't implement all of the recommendations. What are the various, and I will use the word excuses, but what are the various reasons why many of the things that are recommended by the NTSB never find their way into certain protocols?

Ms. HOMENDY. Sometimes they will use costs.

Mr. WOMACK. Cost.

Ms. HOMENDY. They will say the cost is not justified by the benefits. I will say one thing that we are looking at as part of this investigation is ADS-B Out and ADS-B In. ADS-B Out is required for commercial aircraft and has been since 2020, but ADS-B In is not required. We have been on record since 2008 that ADS-B In should be mandated. But the FAA has used cost as a reason not to mandate that.

What that would have done or could have done, and we will look at that as part of this investigation, is the CRJ, the plane, had ADS-B Out. It did not have ADS-B In. Though American does have some Airbus planes that do have ADS-B In, that could have provided them some information about the helicopter positioning and flight path, but that information was not available to them. We will look at how ADS-B In could have helped as well as Out, including at air traffic control throughout our investigation.

Mr. WOMACK. Of all of the data-driven conclusions that were made, including the vertical and horizontal separation, what was most alarming to you?

Ms. HOMENDY. I think what is most alarming to me, well, two things, that you had reporting over years. In fact, there was data going back to 2011 that traffic collision alerts were going off monthly as a result of close proximity to helicopters. And that is from 2011 through 2024. And so for me, all this data is being collected by FAA from operators, from others, from voluntary reporting systems. Where is that data going to trend potential accidents and incidents in the future? The next accident is in the data right now and what are we doing to figure out what that is?

The other most alarming to me is how nobody figured out, based on the glide slope going into Runway 33, that if you look at the helicopter route, that there is only 75 feet of separation between a plane coming in to Runway 33 max. That is 75 feet max. That route doesn't have lateral boundaries. And, in fact, in this case, the helicopter was to the right of the route. So, it is a very small margin for error.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you.

Mr. Clyburn.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Chairman Cole, Ranking Member DeLauro, and members of the committee. Thank you all so much. And thank you very much. I want you to know that last evening I submitted my opening statement that I would hope that will be entered into the record. But there is one particular—

Mr. WOMACK. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

**Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related
Agencies Subcommittee
National Transportation Safety Board Oversight Hearing
Opening Statement for Ranking Member Clyburn**

Thank you, Chairman. I am pleased to be here today as you open this inaugural hearing of this Subcommittee for this Congress.

I too want to welcome Chair Jennifer Homendy and thank her for her service. Not only in your capacity as Board Chair, but in your advocacy for transportation safety and public transparency. You have led the NTSB since 2018 and have done so with the utmost regard for safety and efficiency. I appreciate your unrelenting commitment.

Today we are here to examine the NTSB's efforts to improve transportation safety and how Congress can strengthen its oversight of safe travel for Americans. While the NTSB is primarily charged with investigating aviation incidents, your work has also included investigations into rail, port and bridge incidents, among other transportation modes. This includes the devastating aviation crashes that took far too many lives in this

year alone – DCA, Philadelphia, and Alaska, as well as the tragic Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore last year. There are far too many other preventable accidents to count. In fact, in any given year the NTSB is leading the investigation of more than one thousand accidents domestically and internationally. Their investigations help to improve the work of our transportation operators and manufacturers, while helping government at all levels reassess and improve safety standards for everyone who travels.

Whether public or private transportation, we all rely on the safe integration of our transportation systems. From manufacturing to operation – every product, process, and person must be measured, built, tested and maintained to the highest qualified standard. This cannot be done in the dark, there must be public transparency and legislative accountability. It is my belief that safety is non-negotiable. It is not a “nice to have,” but rather, a bare minimum necessity. Private profits should not be at the expense of the public safety and security of our transportation systems and the American people.

Hopefully today we can learn some ways for this Subcommittee to continue its tradition of working on a

bipartisan basis to improve transportation safety. I believe we all want to help the Department of Transportation, including the FAA, modernize its systems, improve efficiency, and develop a highly skilled workforce. To do that, it's important to learn from the work you are leading at the NTSB, Chair Homendy. I am hopeful that today's conversation will yield better insight into the areas of DOT and the FAA that require immediate and long-term transformation. I encourage your open and honest assessments about lessons learned, possible shortcomings, and productive ways that we can move forward.

Before I close, I do want to acknowledge the loss of a former colleague and friend, Congressman Raúl Grijalva, who is being laid to rest today. Grijalva proudly served his constituents in southern Arizona and was a champion for preserving our natural resources, fighting for bilingual education in our schools, and safeguarding our nation's natural treasures for over two decades. His voice, vision, and passion for public lands and climate action will be deeply missed. My prayers are with his family and loved ones, and with those of my colleagues who are attending his funeral service today, and as such, could not be here for today's hearing.

Again, I thank you Mr. Chairman, and Chair Homendy. I
yield the balance of my time.

Mr. CLYBURN [continuing]. Thing in the opening statement I would like to emphasize.

But let me first join you in welcoming the chair here today. I always stumble over pronouncing her name, Homendy. Thank you so much. And Board Member Brown, it is good to see you, my long-time friend and, as we say down south, homeboy. Thank you so much for being here.

In fact, the part of my opening statement I want to emphasize here just for a moment is this. My belief that safety is non-negotiable. It is not a nice thing to have, but rather a bare minimum as a necessity. And private profits should not be at the expense of the public safety and security of our transportation systems and the American people.

Now, I travel back and forth to South Carolina weekly and I have become very familiar with your board in large part because often I shared the seat with Chair Sumwalt, who chaired this board through several administrations. And we talked a lot about your duties and responsibilities. And particularly I am concerned about this whole question of efficiency. And as the chair will tell you, I am a stickler for effectiveness. That is the "E" that I am particularly concerned with.

And so in view of the fact that in order for you to effectively do your job, there must be interactions with other agencies. We had a roundtable in here yesterday when all the talk was about silos. You cannot operate in a silo. You might take the home county of Mr. Brown, Beaufort, the Marine Air Station is located on one side of a bridge, Parris Island is on the other side of the bridge, the Naval Hospital is two or three bridges. So, in order for you to do your job, you have got to interact with several other agencies. And so when we start talking about building efficiency and getting rid of staff, it seems to me that you are going to be challenged or could be challenged very significantly in carrying out your duties and responsibilities.

So, if you could tell me just a little bit about staffing in your agency. I know that you have not had to reduce anybody, but have you made any projections as to what is going to be required going forward, what it is going to cost for you to interact with these other agencies, to step outside of your comfort zone a little bit to add safety and security to your job, results of your job? Have you done any of that in your preparations for the future?

Ms. HOMENDY. Yes. So, right now, at the end of the year, we had 440 employees, and I brought that up from high 300s when I came in as chair. But since the end of the year, we have lost some employees to retirement or they went to the private sector, so we are down to 427. You have given us the ability to go up to 450 and we are hiring. We have a hiring exemption right now and 14 jobs currently that are posted on USAJobs to bring in personnel.

The hiring exemption currently applies to our investigative staff and maybe a couple of staff outside that, like training specialists. But in order to bring in people, I still need the support team at the NTSB. I can't lose them. I need people in the CFO. I need people, a chief financial officer. I need people in CIO for information technology. I need people who can hire. I need people who are focused on the safety and health of our employees. So, that support team,

I don't have that hiring exemption for them at this time, but it is something that I can request.

Right now our focus is on the investigative staff because we have a pretty big workload and we have hiring exemptions there. But to get to full staffing, we really need to get to between 485 and 500 personnel. That would get us to full staffing, which is why we have requested for fiscal year 2026 more funding than we are currently authorized for. So, we are authorized for 148. We are hoping for 156 or as close as we can to it because we need to get to that higher level because we have such a—we run lean. We have a short bench.

I mean, Clint Crookshanks is behind me. He is a structural engineer. He was at the door plug 1282 investigation. He has got one backup. We are looking to hire two more, but he has a caseload of 20 other cases. So, first of all, I will say when we hire, these are highly skilled professionals. These are experts in their field. And so getting them is a challenge. Retaining them is a challenge if they are burning out because they are on duty 365 days a year and constantly missing family engagements, holidays, you name it. We had a number of investigators that spent Thanksgiving overseas.

So, our biggest risk right now, because our personnel makes us the gold standard for accident investigations, our biggest risk is not having that redundancy in our personnel. And that is what we are looking to accomplish in growing.

Mr. CLYBURN. My time has expired.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you. Before I go to Sheriff Rutherford, just anecdotally, life comes at your members, your staff, just like life comes at all of us. And as it is in regard to your structural gentleman behind you, he lost his mom right in the middle of this whole aircraft investigation incident over the Potomac and you don't just hire people like this gentleman off the street. It does take some time to have their credentials.

Ms. HOMENDY. It also takes about 3 to 5 years in training to get the new hires up to be able to take over a major investigation. That is a significant investment on our part.

Mr. WOMACK. Sheriff Rutherford.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chair, Chairman Cole, and Ranking Member DeLauro. And thank you, Chair Homendy, for being here this morning. And I would be remiss if I didn't point out and say hello to my former mayor, Alvin Brown. Great to see you again, Mayor.

I want to go back to the report that you released in the middle of the Francis Scott Key investigation because that to me, is highly unusual for you all to do that, which means you are thinking there is a real serious issue here that we need to be paying attention to. And so when I look at this report, it becomes even more important to me when I see one of my major bridges, the Dames Point, the Napoleon Bonaparte Dames Point Bridge, is on that report. And it is part of the I-295 infrastructure, hundreds of cars sit on that bridge every day, twice a day. And I see under the classification it is critical and essential. And so can you tell me, is that a description of the bridge's function or is that a classification of the bridge's danger?

Ms. HOMENDY. That is a classification that AASHTO, the state highway transportation officials, give to bridges. In their guide, in their standard, they designate bridges either as critical essential, meaning it is a key corridor, it is a key route.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. So, it is more the use than the exposure.

Ms. HOMENDY. And then there is others that are typical. That is correct.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. But there is also a tremendous amount of exposure on this bridge because it sits in between—it cuts right through our JAXPORT operation, which is shipping coming in and out all day, every day, and it literally splits the port. So, I am really going to go back and get with FDOT after your testimony and find out what we are doing in regards to that, so I thank you for that.

Are there any critical next steps that you think we in Congress can do to expedite the number of what, 68, 69 bridges that haven't been evaluated yet?

Ms. HOMENDY. Just to encourage bridge owners and to work with the Federal Highway Administration and the U.S. Coast Guard and Army Corps of Engineers, who we also recommended to help provide guidance and assistance to the states in order to do their vulnerability assessments. We are not saying these are bridges that are at risk of collapse if there is a vessel collision. What we are saying is to figure it out, look and see if it is at risk, do those mathematical calculations, and if you determine there is, then you have that information where you can take proactive action before something terrible occurs.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Let me ask, as a former first responder myself, I have worked closely with your team on several severe incidents that occurred in our jurisdiction. And sometimes it was fits and starts. It depended who showed up, how smoothly everything went. Is there any type of training that we could support for NTSB to work with some state and local first responders on how we can prepare scenes for you before you show up, those sorts of things that we can be a force multiplier for you before your investigators do show up?

Ms. HOMENDY. Well, Erik Grosos, who is our chief of special operations, is going to be really happy you asked that question because he, in particular, he runs our Response Operations Center, and his entire focus is reaching out to law enforcement and firefighters to educate them on what the NTSB's process is and how they can be helpful. My dream would be or my goal would be to give him additional personnel, four or five people, so that he can split up the country, and they could be very focused in regions on helping train first responders to be able to work with them on the initial stages of an accident. We do that now. I actually speak at a course at the FBI Training Center in Quantico that is focused on law enforcement officers in hopes of developing that relationship before something tragic occurs.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Very good. Also—

Ms. HOMENDY. The four or five people would be, we estimate, with training, about \$200,000 per employee because of travel and everything else. That is not how much they make. So, it is a small investment with a big payoff. We appreciate that.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I assume my time is up. I yield back. But I will tell you, I think that is something that we really need to look at. Talk about bang for your buck. Before the NTSB even gets there, we can be working for them. And so I would appreciate a look.

Mr. WOMACK. Good point. Thank you, Sheriff.

Mrs. Watson Coleman.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you very much for the work that you all do.

You had indicated that there had been 1,500 near collisions near the airspace around the Reagan Airport. Is that for the last couple of years? Did I hear that right?

Ms. HOMENDY. 15,214 close proximity events. That doesn't mean that they were near collisions, but close proximity events where the vertical and lateral separation was too small of a margin.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Yeah.

Mr. WOMACK. That was dating back to '21?

Ms. HOMENDY. '21 to 2024.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Right. Did your organization make observations about how to improve those particular threats of safety?

Ms. HOMENDY. We just issued urgent recommendations to the FAA, which they did swiftly adopt, to prohibit helicopter traffic while planes are landing or departing on Runway 1-5 and Runway 3-3, and to determine an alternative route that could be in use while aircraft are coming in on that runway.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. May I ask, when were those recommendations made? Was that after this particular collision?

Ms. HOMENDY. That was on March 11th. We issued urgent safety recommendations as a result of our investigation.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. So, that is after the collision?

Ms. HOMENDY. Yes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Even though this has been a problem, this sort of proximity issue has been a problem since at least 2021 that we have been tracking. Is that right?

Ms. HOMENDY. We were not tracking that as part of our investigation. We got that data from FAA—

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. After the fact.

Ms. HOMENDY [continuing]. As part of our investigation, and that is what we were able to begin basing our urgent safety recommendations on.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you. Total out of the box question. My understanding is that there is a concept called single pilot operations and that there are European countries that are considering this. This results in reducing crew operations during cruise. From a safety perspective, do you have a position on this?

Ms. HOMENDY. We have not issued a recommendation on two pilots. However, in the Austin near miss investigation, we had a finding that said the pilots in the FedEx plane, which were two, it was the two pilots and the fact that there were two pilots that really saved the day that day and prevented a collision and—

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Yeah.

Ms. HOMENDY [continuing]. Potential fatalities.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. So, some of us who are like being told all the time flying is the safest way of traveling, we are scared right now actually.

One last question that I want to understand. The President of the United States made a really very poor, unsubstantiated, lack of evidence comment about this particular collision at Reagan, and he said that it was related to DEI, diversity, equity, and inclusion. I know that is crazy, but did you find anything in the investigation thus far that would support that notion that this accident happened because of diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Ms. HOMENDY. I was in the Oval Office that morning and met with the President and the Vice President and Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Duffy and the FAA administrator, and I did go to the press briefing. The President held a moment of silence. He talked about the focus on safety for the investigation. He talked about having a report quickly.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I am sorry, ma'am, because my time has expired. I just need you to answer that particular aspect of my question. Was there a legitimate reason for the President to associate the tragedy that took place with diversity, equity, and inclusion, which means that we weren't holding pilots to be all white, straight males?

VOICE. Yes or no?

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Yes or no is the answer. Did you find anything?

Ms. HOMENDY. I can't speak for the President, and we haven't finished our investigation.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Okay. Well, I do hope that when you finish your investigation that—

VOICE. Preliminary report. There was a preliminary.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Well, okay. Did your preliminary report include anything of that ilk?

Ms. HOMENDY. We still have to evaluate all training and qualifications documents.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Ma'am, let me just tell you this is not the time to allow these misstatements to be made and to be unaccounted for because it negatively impacts both what the general public thinks and is concerned about, but it also impacts the people who are trying to do their jobs. And there is nothing that we have found that diversity, equity, and inclusion has created negatively in people doing their job. On the contrary, loyalty and sycophants seems to be the order of the day and it is definitely negatively impacting this Federal Government doing its job.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I do yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. I try to be very generous in how I preside, but it is time to move on.

Mrs. Bice.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you, Chair Homendy, for being with us this morning.

I first want to start out, you mentioned that you had issued a urgent safety recommendation to close Route 4 on March the 11th. There was a previous recommendation to close Route 4 through the end of March as I understand it. How long is this urgent safety recommendation going to be in place?

Ms. HOMENDY. So, the Route 4 closure was actually FAA's decision. That is something that Secretary Duffy did voluntarily to address safety once this collision occurred. That was going to be in place until March 31st, and he was waiting to get our preliminary report to see what we came up. So, we were in close communications and, as a result of that, we did identify some serious safety issues and issue that urgent safety recommendation to close that.

Mrs. BICE. And do you know, is that in effect in perpetuity or what timeframe will that be in effect?

Ms. HOMENDY. Secretary Duffy has adopted the recommendations. And my understanding is right now it is permanent, but certainly it is up to them if they want to look for an alternative route.

Mrs. BICE. Great. I had the great pleasure of visiting with you and your staff, and I was so incredibly impressed with the job that you and your team are doing, and particularly Clint, your investigative lead there, who is really phenomenal and such a wealth of knowledge. And I think that leads me to maybe a follow-up line of questioning as it relates to employees and staffing.

The people that work at your organization have such incredible experience. It takes time. I believe Clint is a structural engineer by trade, if I remember correctly. And so taking that knowledge and being able to utilize it to examine these accidents and figure out how to keep the public safe is time-consuming. You talked already a little bit about staffing issues. Tell me, what is your plan to try to hire more of these folks with this specialized background and keep them in your organization?

This is a very stressful job. It is time-consuming, as you mentioned, with families, but they are seeing a lot of really, I know, terrible things. And so what are you going to do to be able to not only recruit folks to join your organization, but to keep them?

Ms. HOMENDY. Well, we do a lot of outreach. We work with different parties. So, part of our investigative process and how we work collaboratively on safety is our party process. And what that is, is anyone that can provide technical expertise in an investigation becomes a party to the investigation to help us develop the facts. Part of that working relationship, a lot of people find that they want to come to the NTSB. We are a great workforce. We are a great place to work. We want to keep them. We also want to prevent burnout as well, which I think is a real concern.

My ideal would be able to have a situation where Clint or Sean, who runs our recorders division, or Sarah, who is part of the family assistance team, can take time off to be with their families and not be in rotation and have a backup, some redundancy there, so others can come in, so that we can keep them at the NTSB.

Mrs. BICE. Is there a request from Congress that will allow you to be able to do that? Is it just additional funding or are there other things that we can do to be helpful in that way?

Ms. HOMENDY. What would be helpful, 70 percent of our budget is our workforce. And so a lot of agencies need billions of dollars. What I need for fiscal year 2026 is between \$150 and \$156 million. \$156 million is what I asked for. Million, not billion. M, not a B, M. And that will help us get towards that full staffing level that helps keep our workforce that is highly skilled.

They could go anywhere and make millions of dollars. Don't do it, but they could. And that is what we lose. I mean, frankly, during telework, we were losing a bunch of employees to other agencies that had more flexible telework programs. Now people want to come to us. So, I think that speaks very highly of our workforce, but we do need funding.

Mrs. BICE. And one last quick question before my time expires. You mentioned there is currently over 1,000 open recommendations that you all have made as a result of your investigations. Can you tell us how the NTSB coordinates with DOT and other agencies on these recommendations?

You said you don't have enforcement authority, nor do you want it, regulatory oversight. But tell us how you make sure that these recommendations are actually being adopted.

Ms. HOMENDY. So, we have a safety recommendations team. Actually, most of our recommendations don't go to Federal agencies. Most of them are to the entities that may be involved with our investigations or, say, a local fire department or state responders. There might be state police. So, we issue recommendations to many different entities. And throughout the investigation, our biggest hope is we don't issue a safety recommendation that they improve safety through the investigation. But we do have an entire team focused on implementing our safety recommendations. And they meet quarterly with, say, the Federal agencies to figure out how they are meeting them.

One thing people don't realize is just because we issue a safety recommendation doesn't mean you are stuck with that safety recommendation. We are open to an alternative. PHMSA, the Pipeline and Hazardous Material Safety Administration in DOT, is an expert at this. They come back and say we can't do this because we are not going to be able to implement it this way. How about we do it this way? And then we reconsider the recommendation and say, great, that is an alternative that will meet the intent of that recommendation.

So, we actually encourage, when we talk about cost, we encourage agencies and others to come back to us with some alternative. It doesn't mean we know everything about their operations. They may know something we don't know. So, please tell us, is there a different way to do it?

Mrs. BICE. Mr. Chair, I appreciate the extra time and with that, I yield.

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Joyce.

Mr. JOYCE. I want to switch a little bit on you if you don't mind. Oops. Got it? Thank you very much. Glad somebody is looking out for me.

Thank you for being here. But my question goes back to, Chairman, a little over 2 years ago, the Norfolk Southern train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio, spilling the toxic chemicals, as you know, that continue to affect the health of the local communities today. Your investigation in the vent and burn of all five derailed VCM tanks addressed the communication and decision-making processes that led to the vent and burn and the availability of sound criteria for when a vent and burn is appropriate.

Can you give the committee an update on your recommendations for ensuring the proper assessment of when to use vent in burn procedures in the event of an emergency?

Ms. HOMENDY. That recommendation is still being implemented by Norfolk Southern and we continue to follow up. It is not something that they have fully developed yet, but it is something that we are monitoring and encouraging them to implement.

Mr. JOYCE. Have you seen any of these recommendations implemented by other rail systems and/or their contractors since your report was released last June?

Ms. HOMENDY. No.

Mr. JOYCE. Thank you. Recognize these Palestinians in surrounding areas have obviously growing concerns that there will be long-term health effects because of the exposure of these chemicals. Recognizing that your staff has incredibly demanding schedules, therefore time constraints, how long does staff work with families impacted by disasters like East Palestine?

Ms. HOMENDY. So, we currently are working with 1,187 families with active about 470, I think right now, cases. But we, from the initial stages of the investigation, when we were on scene, we are meeting with the families within—when they arrive. It could be within 24, 48 hours, but we begin that communication and we carry that through the course of the investigation. Any time there are updates, they get notice first. Any time there are recommendations prior to the final report, we talk with them and meet with them.

And then sometimes families become advocates for safety and want to work with us to implement our safety recommendations. And so they will work with us for years to implement those safety recommendations. And we really cherish those relationships.

Mr. JOYCE. We have certainly seen that in East Palestine.

Ms. HOMENDY. Yes, in East Palestine; in the Conception dive boat in California, where the families of the 34 who died are still working for change.

Mr. JOYCE. So, if I am hearing you correctly then, your agency doesn't stop when the report is issued. It continues to work through as they receive further information?

Ms. HOMENDY. Yes. So, well past preliminary report, through the final report, and then once the final report is issued, family members, some want to become advocates for safety, some don't. And then our safety advocacy team will work with them to coordinate for implementation of our recommendations.

Mr. JOYCE. I want to switch up again on you both. Though 34 states have changed their laws regarding legal marijuana, it is still illegal everywhere to drive while intoxicated. In a 2022 report, your researchers found that current testing practices and protocols need to be improved to better detect a driver's drug use and accurately report the prevalence of drug-impaired driving. The lack of a standardized drug testing and reporting hinders understanding of the issue and development of policies that can reduce impaired driving as well as treatment options for those with substance abuse disorders. We need to be doing more research, especially in the development of tools that help identify the problem presence of drugs in drivers, in themselves, and others by them operating these vehicles

endangered the motoring public. What does the NTSB recommend other federal agencies and state governments do to address the rise in drug-impaired driving accidents, especially as more communities across the U.S. are beginning to legalize recreational marijuana and can be subjected to this?

Ms. HOMENDY. Yeah, we have long worked on, against drug-impaired driving. We work with states. We recently did an investigation in Oklahoma where some teens died, and it involved drug-impaired driving. And actually, we had found that this is really across the United States. I am sure you all remember that when we all went to school, we had driver education as part of our school curriculum, and it was pretty robust. Today, that education doesn't occur. So, for teens that died in Oklahoma, we had found that that driver education around drug-impaired driving did not occur. Now, they put that back in place, but that doesn't occur across our country.

What is very interesting is that organizations have done some research and have found that for teen drivers, in particular teen drivers, a third of them think it is legal to drive after intaking marijuana, 25 percent of adults. Usage has gone up significantly and we need to do a number of things including testing protocols, training for law enforcement officers so they can detect drug-impaired driving, increased enforcement, and then training itself for the public.

Mr. JOYCE. I wholeheartedly agree with you. And what is even more disturbing is the crap that they sell at local gas stations to underage kids without any regulation that creates much worse effects and puts these kids out on the motoring highway with no concept of what is going wrong.

Ms. HOMENDY. I have a 17-year-old. I understand and I worry about it all the time. And usage has gone up significantly. It was not too long ago, I believe I saw five years ago it was 20 million Americans were using American marijuana. Now it is up to 64 million. The usage has skyrocketed and meanwhile we have drivers who think it is legal. I mean, we have all been at traffic lights in D.C. where somebody pulls up and you can smell it. It is awful. And terrible tragedies that we have investigated over and over again involving marijuana, other drugs, and then alcohol, of course.

Mr. JOYCE. Thank you very much for your work.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you. Mr. Strong.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Chairman Womack and Ranking Member Clyburn for holding this important hearing today, as well as Chairman Homendy for your continued commitment to public service and safety. Chairman Homendy, Alabama is currently assigned to the NTSB's Eastern Regional Office whose headquarters and personnel are based in Washington, D.C. My colleague Mr. Rutherford mentioned working with first responders. How does the NTSB ensure that its investigators working in regions like Alabama are fully familiar with the local governance geography and other factors that impact investigations?

Ms. HOMENDY. Well, first I am pleased to tell you that my daughter's number one is a college in Alabama, right now. So I was just in Alabama visiting a few of them. I might not say which one because I am not sure which side you are on there. But for our investigators, we have investigators in the headquarters, but we also

have a number of our investigators that are stationed around the United States. And I will specifically look on Alabama to see who might be in that area. But where we can, our regional investigators that do the regional investigations. We do have others across the country.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. In north Alabama, the most recent NTSB investigation required close coordination with several local agencies, including the Scottsboro City Fire and Police Department, Hollywood, Alabama Fire Department, and Jackson County Emergency Management. How frequently does NTSB conduct joint training exercises or professional development initiatives with state and local agencies to ensure both investigators and first responders are well prepared to handle emerging incidents and are fully integrated into the investigative process?

Ms. HOMENDY. I would have to get you exact figures and I can do that, for the record. However, we do a lot of training with law enforcement and fire personnel and we would like to do a lot more.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you.

Ms. HOMENDY. We think it is critical. Right now, we will have first responders who call us and report accidents and say what should we do here? Others who have developed relationships with us. So we do think it is critical. I will get you figures.

Mr. STRONG. Chair Homendy, in your written testimony you highlighted the importance of enhancing the NTSB's use of data to drive greater effectiveness and innovation. Huntsville, Alabama is the largest city in the state of Alabama. Forty years as a firefighter, assistant chief, emergency medical technician. Over the years we have worked well with NTSB to investigate airplane crashes, helicopter crashes, and even a school bus crash that critically injured 31 teenagers on one of our interstates. When an accident occurs, is there a centralized system or shared database where all relevant agencies, including the NTSB can access and review the same data? How does the NTSB ensure that there is no overlap of work and prevent duplicative efforts in data review?

Ms. HOMENDY. So, the NTSB for aviation accidents, we are the holders. All aviation accidents are reported to the NTSB, and we take that information, and we include them in a database. We also have a database for all the other modes of transportation that the public can access. And we are always looking to make improvements and get input on where we can make improvements. It is not duplicative. It is very focused on our investigations. The ones that we conduct for aviation, it is all of them. For the other modes, it is only the ones that we are conducting.

Mr. STRONG. When conflicting data arises between agency, who has the final say on which information is considered the most accurate and reliable?

Ms. HOMENDY. I would have to say it depends on which data you are referencing.

Mr. STRONG. That is right. As you mentioned, the National Transportation Safety Board relies on highly skilled staff to conduct accident investigations. As the NTSB investigators near retirement age, what strategies does NTSB have to incentivize, recruit, train, and retain the next generation of investigators to carry out the mission effectively?

Ms. HOMENDY. We do have strategic plans. One thing that we would like to do is human capital planning. In order to do that, and a skills assessment, it would take about \$1.5 to \$2 million, which is pretty significant for us. But it is something that we do want to undertake. We have looked across the modes and all the offices to figure out where the biggest gaps are and gotten input from all the directors for that. But we can do a better job. We can do a better job. And we want to do a better job at recruiting, training, and retaining our workforce. When I say that we need more resources, it comes with we have to make improvements as well. We have to be accountable for making those improvements, and that includes being able to have the best workforce out there.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. In closing, I want to thank you for your leadership, the NTSB board members and the entire team for their faithful service to our country. I remember well a quote made by former board member Deborah Hersman at a critical scene that I was at, at a tragic investigation that we worked together. She told the media, we will investigate what went right that will lead to what went wrong. I thank each of you for the job that you do. And my daughter graduated from Auburn in May and my son's a junior at Auburn, but we like them Crimson Tide people too.

Ms. HOMENDY. I did get some good lemonade there. I did get some good lemonade there.

Mr. STRONG. Toomer's Corner.

Ms. HOMENDY. Yep.

Mr. STRONG. Love it.

Mr. WOMACK. Honestly, I expected him to put in a plug for Athens State University. He is a proud bear. But, and this I can tell you he is going to be rooting against BYU on Thursday and he is going to be rooting against Michigan on Friday. I can only hope that late Thursday night he will be rooting for my Razorbacks.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member. Very informative hearing and thank each of you for what you do for our country.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you. Thank you, Dale. Welcome, by the way, to the subcommittee. Ms. DeLauro. We are going to do a lightning round.

Ms. DELAURO. Yes.

Mr. WOMACK. Let us go two or three minutes and any remaining questions.

Ms. DELAURO. Sure. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. And just a couple of points and then a question. I just wanted to make reference to the comment by the President, Vice President, Secretary of Defense on DEI as responsible for the crash and which is, let us take a look at who the air traffic controllers are, 16 percent of them are women, 36 percent of them are veterans. If you want to maintain morale and you want to maintain the commitment, the dedication, and the knowledge, et cetera, then you just don't make offhanded comments that talk about DEI as being responsible for a crash which killed 67 people. It is just unbelievable that that would be the statement.

Secondly, I want to just get back at the issue of staffing. I understand that there are 554 open recommendations for DOT and the

various modes. And aviation, there is 180; and on the highways piece it is about 187. So those are the two biggest pieces.

And what I asked earlier on 790 employees terminated, 340 from FAA 170, from Federal Highways Administration. If you are working with these agencies, we have to understand and know what those terminations of that staffing. You talked about, your staff and those who are protected, not protected, but we have to know from you because it is saving lives. This is not a matter of buying a helicopter and so forth, but this is saving lives. But if there is an impact on your agency with the loss of personnel in these other places that help you do your job, which you do very well, it is a gold standard, but it was a gold standard with a full complement of people working there. That is information that we really need to have.

And I am asking you, I would like to get—we can speak offline or we can talk about this, but I think it is critically important for us to know what is happening with the terminations in this area that affects your ability to save people's lives? Now, the piece of that you can answer, are we then now transferring this effort which you do to states to close out the recommendations? Are we saying, we can't, the State Departments of Transportation have to do that so that we are not then saying the federal government isn't going to be there, but we are going to rely on the states? A lot of that is happening in this area. So, a lot of that pushing stuff to the states is what is on the agenda. So, with regard to that and what you do and those recommendations, how are they going to get carried out?

Ms. HOMENDY. It depends on the recommendation. But for our recommendations, right now we are working with personnel at the Department of Transportation, other federal agencies, and state agencies. We have not seen an impact on our investigations at this time or our recommendations. However, if there is one, I will commit to notifying the committee if we see any sort of negative effect like that.

Ms. DELAURO. What kind of role are the states taking on? Are you pushing things to the state to deal with, with regard to the recommendations?

Ms. HOMENDY. We—

Ms. DELAURO. You said—go ahead.

Ms. HOMENDY. We are not pushing anything to the states, but we might have recommendations to states to improve state laws in a certain area. I had mentioned Oklahoma with the drug-impaired driving. We encouraged the State of Oklahoma to make improvements to teen driver education. And they made that through their efforts through the State Department, their Oklahoma Department of Transportation. Those are the types of state initiatives. Drunk driving, we have a long-standing recommendations for states to go to 0.05 instead of 0.08. That is something for a recommendation that goes to all the states.

Ms. DELAURO. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank the gentlelady. My final question. I am reminded of the famous movie the Wizard of Oz when Dorothy was talking about lions, tigers, and bears, oh my. The threats that she perceived that she was facing. I can only imagine what your break

room is like when new technology, emerging technology, and I am talking about things like drones, vertical takeoff and landing, driverless cars and trucks, things that could pose a threat to the transportation safety of this country and the world. Can you look into your crystal ball and tell us where the next real threats are going to come from that could cause your agency to have to be spun up and conduct another major investigation?

Ms. HOMENDY. I mean, it could really happen in any mode of transportation. Certainly, there are emerging technologies in each mode of transportation, many of which you mentioned. But our agency is ready. We have technology ourselves, but we are constantly evolving as new technology comes out. We have needs there as well.

We are making sure that our employees are ready from a standpoint of training. We do want to increase our investment in training for our employees. But it is tough to say in my crystal ball, because I look across all modes of transportation and see that there could be significant disasters in any of those modes. What I will say, and I know there is been a lot of focus on aviation, our biggest contributor to fatalities right now in transportation is on our roads. Over 40,000 people are dying on our nation's roads every year, millions injured. You know, we talk about transportation accidents as single accidents, but every day an average of 112 people are dying on our roads; 112 people, and we don't blink an eye. There is so much we have to do to improve road safety across the U.S. and we have so many recommendations on that. If we can get that number down, that would be significant. That is 95 percent of all transportation fatalities.

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Clyburn talked about silos, how agencies perform in silos. And I think it is wise for an organization like yours that is going to be on the receiving end of the next tragedy that is going to happen, for you guys to be invited into some of those silos to help forestall, maybe, or prevent some of the future tragic accidents from happening.

Mr. Clyburn.

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, let me extend on that silo business for a moment. I am going to be harping on this for a long time, Mr. Chairman. I made the mistake of spending some time with air traffic controllers. I am never going up in one of those things again. I met with them two days ago, turned down all invitations, because I really, really feel that not enough focus is placed on air traffic controllers. I think they are tremendously understaffed. I know where the training takes place, and I am all right with that. We need to expand. Either they need to build one in South Carolina or expand their facility in Oklahoma, wherever it is. I don't know that you are reporting on your status. Well, let me just put it this way. I am haunted by the fact that talked about tragedy in Washington, here. There was only one controller in the tower when it happened. That is the reporting. I have no idea whether or not that is true. And I understand that from the reporting, that that was not unusual. You talked about two pilots. I don't know. Is it true there is only one at the time?

Ms. HOMENDY. No, there were five at the time in the tower. There were nine on duty. What you might be referring to is the

combining of positions. There were six at one point during the day before 3:40 p.m., where actually it could have been seven because they combined the position for clearance delivery and flight data, which is not uncommon. But they did combine positions for the helicopter position and the local traffic position into one. The person didn't leave. So, it went down to five controllers at the time of the accident. That combined position was at 3:40 p.m. It stayed that way. The person went on break. Came back into rotation at 4:27 p.m. But in total, there were nine people on duty that day.

Mr. CLYBURN. There were nine people in the tower?

Ms. HOMENDY. Five.

Mr. CLYBURN. I am not talking about—

Ms. HOMENDY. Five. Five in the cab.

Mr. CLYBURN. At the time of the accident?

Ms. HOMENDY. Correct.

Mr. CLYBURN. Okay. Well, I don't know why that reporting is out there, but it is been out there pretty extensively. And I have been haunted by that. In talking with them, air traffic controllers, they tell me that they are tremendously understaffed, tremendously understaffed. I don't understand how this country will tolerate air traffic controllers being tremendously understaffed. There is a problem with that, that I would hope that in your reporting of your studies that you will take a look outside of your silo and see what has happened with air traffic controllers and make some recommendations as to what we ought to be doing.

Ms. HOMENDY. So, we—

Mr. CLYBURN. That, to me, is a very serious problem.

Ms. HOMENDY. We have a number of investigators that focus on air traffic control at the NTSB. As part of this investigation, we have an entire investigative group focused on air traffic control. They are going to be looking at everything from staffing to changes in staffing over time at DCA, to whether there should be more staffing. They will look at operations at DCA in total and over time. So they are former air traffic controllers that are working on this, and it will be part of our investigation.

Mr. WOMACK. Ms. Bice, do you have a comment?

Mrs. BICE. I just want to say, first of all, thank you to Secretary Duffy for coming to the FAA facility, Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center in Oklahoma, looking at the facility, recognizing that part of the challenge is technology, that we need to be investing in technology. And he has made a commitment to FAA that that is going to happen. And secondly, you know, one of the challenges we have is recruiting and retaining these FAA air traffic controllers because it is a very long process. It can take five months to two years just to clear medical training. Then you have the training itself. Then you are assigned to an airport, and you have to work your way up. We have not done the best job, in my opinion, of filling that pipeline adequately. And I do think that Secretary Duffy is very on target with his plan to try to address this issue quickly. And I welcome the expansion of the FAA Center in Oklahoma City. With that I yield.

Mr. WOMACK. And with that shameless plug, we are going to go back to the Sheriff.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just briefly, I will say because this has been brought up, the President's remarks about DEI hiring having created some of the shortfall of the air traffic controllers. There is a class action lawsuit about this issue, and in fact under the Obama administration, they changed their assessments from a skill-based assessment to a biographical assessment. They have now gone back, as a result of actions by this Congress. Well, not this Congress, but the one before. And so, that 3800 shortage that the FAA is looking at in ATS controllers is a result of qualified people being denied employment for DEI reasons. And that is why I think the President made that reference. I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Joyce.

Mr. JOYCE. Get our mic going. We are going to switch topics on you yet again. According to your recommendation related to the Baltimore bridge collapse, Ohio has five bridges that require an assessment of their vulnerability to vessel strike related collapse. What were the most common issues or inconsistencies with the current vulnerability assessment requirements that led the NTSB to identify the 68 bridges in need of evaluation?

Ms. HOMENDY. So, we worked with the Federal Highway Administration to determine our list of bridges. We started with a much bigger list and focused on ocean-going vessels in navigable waterways and then began limiting that list, and came down to 68 that had not done vulnerability assessments of their bridges prior to recommendations by AASHTO in 1991 and 2009, which those recommendations were to look at your existing bridges and to do a vulnerability assessment. The vulnerability assessment was created in 1991 and updated in 2009. And at the time, they said for existing bridges that they should go back and do those vulnerability assessments.

So, we are recommending out of these 68 bridges that they go back and do that assessment. And there is pretty substantial data that they are going to have to put into that assessment. Some of the states may have done it and we don't know—or I am sorry, the bridge owners may have done it and we don't know yet but we know that they need to—we felt so strongly about this that we issued an urgency safety recommendations so that they would determine risk and report that back to the NTSB and then take proactive measures to ensure safety.

Mr. JOYCE. Do you foresee the NTSB then issuing further guidance on how bridge owners can reduce their risk or should bridge owners wait for guidance and risk education system from the Federal Highway Administration, the Coast Guard, or the Army Corps?

Ms. HOMENDY. So, there is a guidance already out there by AASHTO, the State Highway Transportation Officials, that is there including how to do the method two calculations. The assistance would be helping them in getting the data, which is where the Federal Highway Administration, the Coast Guard, and the Army Corps of Engineers can be most helpful.

Mr. JOYCE. Great. Thank you very much.

Ms. HOMENDY. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. Ms. Bice.

Mrs. BICE. Mr. Strong.

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Strong, bring us home.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. And I am going to bring it home quick. Number one, I wouldn't jeopardize an investor under any circumstance, but the facts are 67 people lost their life at Reagan National. Greater than 850 takeoffs and landings happen every day at Reagan National Airport. My understanding, an air traffic controller is or was designated to solely do air traffic control for helicopters until 9:30 p.m., nightly. Was this helicopter air traffic control in their position the night of the crash or had they left their post? The final report will answer most of these questions and we await the completion of your investigation. And I think that will answer all the questions that members of Congress and the families that lost loved ones have. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Yeah. Thank you. In a good way to bring this hearing to a close. And the report that will come out, we can all have great confidence that it is going to be a highly professional, thorough, very detailed, conclusive report. And to that, Ms. Homendy, we are eternally grateful for what you and your team do. I want to ask you one final question. What did we not ask you today that we should have?

Ms. HOMENDY. Would you like to be an NTSB investigator? Because that is always the last question that we ask in all of our interviews. Would you like to hear what we need again for fiscal year 2026?

Mr. WOMACK. You know, you are talking to the people who will ultimately, I mean, we will get a budget, we will be presented a budget, and we know what happens to most of those presidential budgets. But eventually the appropriations committee, if in fact we can get back to regular order, we will have to make some of the tough calls. So, I think it is certainly within—

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Mr. Chairman, the answer was \$156 million.

Ms. HOMENDY. \$156 million. We do need to get to full staffing. We need to provide the ability for our workforce—I would like to increase training funds for our workforce, increase outreach to law enforcement and to firefighters, but that takes resources. We are very good stewards of our resources. I have gone through every single contract that we have to determine is there anything here that we need to change. But you know, our—and I will say I did look at the cost for government requirements is going up. The cost alone for government mandates is \$6.4 million to the NTSB from 2024. We looked across the agency. \$6.4 million is pretty significant for a budget of \$145.

But here is what I will say. We also, when we ask for increased funding, we know that we also have to improve performance. We always strive to do better. When I came in as chair, I met with all stakeholders in all modes of transportation, not to figure out what we were doing right, to figure out what we were doing wrong and how we could be better. And we have looked at our risks proactively and we know what we need to address. We are not perfect, but we strive to do better every day for our workforce. For the taxpayer, I think it is critical.

There are a lot of agencies right now that are, maybe, need to look at rightsizing agencies. But for the NTSB, we do run lean, and

we are good stewards of our resources. But that comes with a requirement that we need to be held accountable as well for delivering our accident reports, our recommendations. When I came in as chair, as you started, we had over 400, close to 480 accident investigations that were over 2, 3, 4 years old. We are now down to—well, we are down to—it fluctuates. Some days it will be five over, but it is usually for something that is not in our control. But we are down to zero.

We eliminated that backlog because we invested in our workforce, and we said we had to be held accountable for delivering on safety and we take that very seriously, our role.

I will say in closing that this committee has been very supportive of the NTSB. Your state staff has been incredible to work with. Each of you as members has been really supportive of our agency, and we really appreciate all your work. We know you have a difficult job to do. You have to balance a number of priorities. We just ask that you consider us among those priorities, because an investment in us will save lives.

Mr. WOMACK. Well, it is easy to invest in an organization that is highly capable, highly competent, and well led. Mr. Clyburn, final remarks?

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me just say this. I am not much of a moviegoer. Every Christmas, I do show a sort of a historical movie to a group that I spend the holidays with. And one of those, this past Christmas, The Six Triple Eight. I would recommend that my colleague take a look at that movie and see what DEI is all about.

I didn't see the Red Tails, which was the movie made about the Tuskegee Airmen. I think we have to, DEI is something we ought to be very, very careful about. Those Tuskegee Airmen gave service to this country. And most people you talk to coming out of World War II said that a lot of those fighter pilots would not fly unless those Tuskegee Airmen were flying with them. John Glenn would not go up on his flight into space unless those four African American women signed off on it. So, DEI is something we ought to be very careful about.

Mr. WOMACK. And on that note, we thank you again for your time today, for your staff, for the work that you do on behalf of a grateful country. Thank you so much. This hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:55 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

Jennifer Homendy, Chair
Oversight Hearing – National Transportation Safety Board
 [Chairman Steve Womack]
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

Overheated Bearings, Rail Safety

Question Background: The East Palestine train derailment final report confirms that the derailment was a result of an overheated bearing. This is not uncommon. Overheated bearings are one of the most common causes of derailments. The NTSB has recommended FRA to further research the effectiveness of current bearing defect detection systems and identify minimum standards for defect detection, like maximum distances between wayside detectors.

Question: Can you summarize the recommendations on mitigating overheated bearings? How often has inadequate defect detection resulted in derailments? Is this the smoking gun of most modern derailments? Has FRA engaged with NTSB on these recommendations?

At the time the final report for East Palestine was released, overheated bearing failures made up 7.7 percent of derailments caused by mechanical failures. They are the single most common cause for mechanically based derailments, and are the 16th leading cause of all derailments.

A well-placed and effective monitoring system should catch these failures before they lead to derailments. Bearings can fail at unpredictable rates due to maintenance practices, environmental conditions, and loading stress. In cases where a bearing fails in short distances, even properly spaced detectors may not catch it in time due to the distance between detectors.

Adding more wayside detectors, integrating onboard monitoring systems, or utilizing predictive maintenance technologies could improve detection accuracy, but implementing these solutions system-wide would be expensive.

Trending defect data plays an important role in identifying potential early failures. By using data-driven analytics to identify patterns and anomalies, railroads can act quickly to address issues before they escalate. However, the effectiveness of these identifiers depends on how promptly and efficiently railroads respond to early notifications of failure. Proactive measures would not only reduce the risk of derailments but also improve the overall safety and efficiency of the railway system. Such improvements require improved technology as well as protocols on how to handle early warning identifiers.

As a result of the derailment in East Palestine, the NTSB issued five recommendations related to bearing defect detection, provided below. In summary, we recommended that the FRA research currently available bearing defect detection systems and use this information to establish minimum performance standards for the systems, installation and maintenance

standards, and operational requirements for responding to alarms. The FRA responded to these recommendations on January 10, 2025, and NTSB staff is evaluating the response.

We issued a recommendation to the Association of American Railroads (AAR) to develop a database of bearing failures. The AAR responded to this recommendation November 4, 2024, asserting that its existing database of bearing replacement was adequate. The Board disagreed, urged the AAR to build on the existing database, and classified Safety Recommendation R-24-19 Open—Unacceptable Response on March 19, 2025.

Number	Recipient	Recommendation
R-24-2	FRA	Research the effectiveness of current bearing defect detection systems, identify minimum standards to protect railroad personnel and the public, and make public the results of this research.
R-24-3	FRA	Use the results of the research described in R-24-2 to develop and establish minimum requirements for bearing defect detection systems, including criteria for bearing alert and alarm thresholds and maximum distances between wayside detectors.
R-24-4	FRA	Establish requirements for the installation, inspection, and maintenance of wayside bearing defect detectors to protect the reliability of these devices and improve the safety of railroad operations.
R-24-5	FRA	Use the results of the research described in R-24-2 to develop and establish rules governing railroads' operational responses to bearing alerts and alarms.
R-24-19	AAR	Develop a database of bearing failures and replacements and make it available to railroads, regulators, and investigators to help determine and address failure risk factors.

Tank Cars, Rail Safety

Question Background: The East Palestine train derailment final report provides several recommendations for the tank cars utilized for transport of hazardous materials. It also highlights the failure-prone nature of DOT-111 tank cars, citing that 88 percent of hazardous material related tank car accidents from 2013 to 2023 likely would have been mitigated using a more robust tank car. The DOT-105 pressure tank cars and DOT-117 nonpressure tank cars have proven to be much more resilient than DOT-111 cars. While the 2016 FAST Act required a phase-out of DOT-111 cars for flammable liquids, NTSB has recommended this phase-out be expedited. NTSB has also recommended PHMSA establish a tank car replacement schedule for all hazardous materials transportation, given that some of the punctured tank cars in this accident would not be captured in this FAST Act modernization.

Question: Has PHMSA been responsive to these recommendations? Have you had any reaction from the freight rail industry on this recommendation? Do you foresee cost burdens to reaching compliance with this recommendation, if implemented?

The NTSB issued five recommendations to PHMSA as a result of the derailment in East Palestine. PHMSA responded to these recommendations on October 11, 2024, and NTSB staff is evaluating the response. PHMSA's response expressed support for Safety Recommendations R-24-12 and -13, which address the phase out of DOT-111 tank cars and replacement with DOT-117 tank cars. However, on October 28, 2024, PHMSA published a proposed rule to revise the Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMRs) that conflicts with its response. Specifically, the proposed revisions effectively acknowledge PHMSA's approval for the continued construction of less protective tank car specifications than the DOT-117 specification.

We have not received any response from the freight rail industry to these recommendations to PHMSA, and we have not evaluated any potential costs, though we are certain of the significant benefits to the public of making hazardous materials transportation by rail safer.

Vent-and-Burn, Rail Safety

Question Background: While the East Palestine derailment was the result of an overheated roller bearing, the subsequent fire caused by the punctured DOT-111 tank cars and the release of hazardous material had lasting consequences for the Northeast Ohio community. The final report condemns Norfolk Southern and its contractors for their failure to communicate to the incident commander the dissenting opinions regarding the "vent-and-burn" of the leaking vinyl chloride. The incident commander was given 13 minutes to decide what to do but was only presented with one point of view when there are several alternative procedures to mitigate the situation.

Question: Based on your investigative findings, do you believe improved training, like that available to emergency responders through PHMSA's ALERT program, could improve incident command operations in these situations in the future?

Although the local emergency response agency functions as the incident commander under the National Incident Management System, major rail incidents require reliance on railroad subject matter experts and their specialized emergency response contractors. This is especially critical when faced with complex hazardous materials incidents that require highly technical mitigation measures, such as vent and burn.

As we pointed out in the East Palestine investigation report, the fire chief/incident commander, who ultimately decided whether to approve the vent and burn, was misinformed about the condition of the tank cars and the urgency of taking action. We believe that training and improved awareness would have better informed the incident commander's decisions and could have led him to bar the use of the vent and burn procedure.

Our report pointed out that, in October 2007, the FRA developed two guidance documents, titled Tank Car Vent and Burn Process Study: Phase I and Phase II; however, the documents were classified as Sensitive Security Information (SSI) and therefore not available to the incident commander. The stated purpose of this study was to develop guidelines and tools to help emergency response personnel determine when to use the vent and burn method and to help guide them through the procedure. Although it is unclear if access to these reports would have led the incident commander to a different decision, the reports would have provided him with additional information and the tools needed to ask further questions.

Since the East Palestine incident, the FRA released a publicly available version of the vent and burn guidance documents; however, we have recommended that it distribute updated versions of these reports to emergency responder organizations, including the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.

The local volunteers who are often the first on the scene of a derailment could benefit greatly from programs like PHMSA's ALERT. Firefighters from the East Palestine Fire Department conducted operations near burning tank cars before information about what the train was carrying was communicated to the incident command. The first command post was also located within a few hundred feet of the postderailment fire. Proximity to tank cars carrying hazmat exposed firefighters to elevated risk and contradicted the advice outlined in the Emergency Response Guide published regularly by the US Department of Transportation. Our investigation found that Ohio volunteer firefighter training requirements did not equip the East Palestine Fire Department to execute a safe response—even though the firefighters acted in good faith to protect their community.

Because derailments involving hazardous materials often occur in remote areas typical of the energy and chemical industries, better training for emergency responders in small, rural departments would be a positive step toward equipping them to protect themselves while protecting their communities in hazardous materials emergencies.

Boeing, ODA Program

Question Background: The NTSB has conducted several significant investigations involving Boeing aircraft in recent years, including the 737 MAX crashes in Indonesia (2018) and Ethiopia (2019), and the January 2024 door plug incident on an Alaska Airlines Flight. The FAA's Organization Designation Authorization (ODA) program delegates certification and oversight responsibilities to manufacturers' designated employees, who act on the FAA's behalf while remaining on the manufacturer's payroll.

Question: Given the findings of your recent investigations into Boeing, are you confident that the current structure and implementation of the ODA program gives these designees sufficient independence and authority to prioritize safety over production pressures? Regarding the door plug incident, what is the status of the NTSB's safety recommendations to the FAA concerning

Boeing's manufacturing practices, and to what extent has the FAA implemented these recommendations?

The NTSB has made several recommendations related to the US certification process as a result of investigations into the Boeing 737 MAX crashes in Indonesia and Ethiopia; the Boeing 787 battery fire in Boston, Massachusetts; and others. These recommendations address deficiencies with assumptions used in the process as well as the need to improve quality control and oversight of manufacturers. Most of these recommendations remain open or have been closed in an acceptable status.

However, in 2021, following a fatal accident involving PenAir, a Part 121 carrier, in Unalaska, Alaska, we recommended that the FAA require organizations that design, manufacture, and maintain aircraft to establish a safety management system (SMS) (Safety Recommendation A-21-48). The NTSB has long recommended implementation of SMS across all modes of transportation to identify and mitigate safety risks before an accident occurs. In a final rule, "Safety Management Systems," which was published on April 26, 2024, the FAA required production certificate and type certificate holders under Part 21 to have an SMS, which could help mitigate or prevent accidents involving design and production issues. However, the FAA still does not require an SMS for those organizations that maintain aircraft, and the recommendation is classified Open—Unacceptable Response.

Urgent Bridge Risk Profile Recommendation

Question Background: Your preliminary report on the Francis Scott Key Bridge incident tells us the bridge conditions before the collision were satisfactory based on recent inspections. We also know that the bridge had two types of pier protections that failed to prevent the collision. However, the bridge had not undergone a vessel strike vulnerability study in accordance with state Highway guidance, and your team has discovered that the bridge's risk profile was nearly 30 times the accepted risk level.

Question: What factors make up a risk profile? How could a bridge in good condition with proper pier protections in place have a high risk of vessel strike? Can you provide more detail on why the urgent recommendation to 68 bridge-owners was issued? What about your findings made the recommendation urgent to issue?

Although the Francis Scott Key bridge had ongoing maintenance and passed required inspections, being in "good" condition is not a factor in calculating a bridge's annual frequency of collapse (vulnerability assessment). The Francis Scott Key Bridge was designed before the development of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials' (AASHTO's) vulnerability assessment, which details the design of new highway bridges for vessel collision and also aids owners of existing bridges to assess potential risks. Although the Key Bridge was designed with two forms of pier protection (dolphins and timber fendering systems), those systems were inadequate to provide the

level of protection needed to account for the types of vessels transiting the port given the factors that are considered in the assessment. Given their small size relative to the size and weight of the vessels transiting the port, coupled with their location away from the pier, the protection provided by the dolphins was minimal and did not contribute significantly to decrease risk. The timber fender systems surrounding the main piers were not designed to provide adequate protection against impacts by the types of vessels transiting the port and were considered sacrificial; therefore, they were not considered when calculating risk.

To identify the 30 owners of the 68 bridges receiving the urgent recommendations, the NTSB worked with the FHWA to identify bridges over navigable waterways frequented by oceangoing vessels. We then filtered those bridges based on a number of factors so that the 68 bridges were ones with an unknown risk of a catastrophic bridge collapse from a vessel collision and whose owners may be unaware of the need to implement countermeasures. With this vulnerability assessment calculation, bridge owners would have information to proactively identify strategies, if needed, to reduce the risk of a bridge collapse and the loss of lives associated with a vessel collision.

Urgent recommendations allow the NTSB to identify and address safety concerns in the course of an investigation and take immediate action before the final report is published.

Jennifer Homendy, Chair
Oversight Hearing – National Transportation Safety Board
 Ranking Member DeLauro
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

Implementation Responsibilities: Engaging with the Department of Transportation

The NTSB has no direct authority to change transportation safety regulations and practices and instead relies on Federal and State Governments, or industry, to implement NTSB safety recommendations.

It is my understanding that DOT agencies must provide a formal written response to each NTSB recommendation, detailing how they intend to implement the recommendation in whole or in part.

Question: Please provide a list of the NTSB recommendations issued to the U.S. Department of Transportation from April 1, 2023 through April 1, 2025, including the Operational Divisions within each DOT Operating Administration that are cited as responsible for implementing such recommendations.

We have issued a total of 88 safety recommendations to the DOT and its modal agencies since April 1, 2023. 86 of the 88 recommendations remain open. The full list of recommendations is attached.

Agency	# Recs Issued
DOT	3
FAA	35
FHWA	7
FMCSA	5
FRA	23
FTA	0
NHTSA	5
PHMSA	10
Total	88

Non-Implementation

Chair Homendy, you said that cost is often the reason that NTSB safety recommendations are not implemented.

Question: Please provide a list of all safety recommendations made to the U.S. Department of Transportation from April 1, 2023 through April 1, 2025 that remain wholly or partially outstanding and identify each recommendation where the U.S. Department of Transportation indicated the need for resources in order to implement any such safety recommendations in their response to NTSB recommendation(s), or where NTSB believes that cost is the reason for non-implementation.

A list of all NTSB safety recommendations issued to the DOT or its modal agencies is attached. Of the 88 recommendations issued, 86 remain open. Nineteen of the open recommendations to the

DOT or its modal agencies are currently Open—Awaiting Response. Because the recipient has not responded, we do not know why the recommendations have not been implemented. Five of the recommendations are currently classified Open—Unacceptable Response. Each superseded a previous recommendation that had not been addressed.

A-24-4 (FAA): Collaborate with aircraft and avionics manufacturers and software designers to develop the technology for a flight deck system that would provide visual and aural alerts to flight crews of traffic on a runway or taxiway and traffic on approach to land. (Supersedes A-00-66)

A-24-5 (FAA): Require that the technology developed in response to Safety Recommendation A-24-4 be installed in all newly certificated transport-category airplanes. (Supersedes A-00-66)

A-24-6 (FAA): Require that existing transport-category airplanes be retrofitted with the technology developed in response to Safety Recommendation A-24-4. (Supersedes A-00-66)

A-24-9 (FAA): Require retrofit of all cockpit voice recorders (CVR) on all airplanes required to carry both a CVR and a flight data recorder with a CVR capable of recording the last 25 hours of audio. (Supersedes A-18-31)

H-24-26 (FMCSA): Incorporate Safety Measurement System on-road performance data into your methodology for determining a motor carrier's fitness to operate. (Supersedes Safety Recommendation H-12-017)

NTSB and Party Interference

The day after the deadly Midair Collision outside of DCA airport between PSA Airlines CRJ700 Airplane and a UH-60 Military Helicopter, President Trump blamed "DEI" or diversity initiatives as a contributing cause of the aircraft collision and questioned the actions of the air traffic controllers and a U.S. Army helicopter pilot involved in the midair collision.

It is my understanding that in June of 2024, when the Boeing Company "made unsubstantiated speculations about possible causes¹" of the Jan. 5 Boeing 737-9 MAX Door Plug blowout, NTSB imposed restrictions on Boeing's access to the investigation and reminded Boeing that "parties are prohibited from making any comments regarding the cause of the event". Further, NTSB asserted that NTSB "has not made any such determination, and our investigators have not yet ruled out design or manufacturing issues as contributing to this event."

In its June 27, 2024 letter to Boeing Company President and CEO David Calhoun, NTSB went on to say that "Only the NTSB may determine the probable cause of an accident and issue safety recommendations designed to prevent future accidents." And "only appropriate NTSB personnel are authorized to publicly disclose investigative information, and even then, the disclosure is limited to factual information".

¹ <https://www.nts.gov/news/Documents/NTSB-Letter-to-The-Boeing-Company.pdf>

To date, NTSB has not corrected the record or the baseless statements made by President Trump and has not yet asserted that NTSB alone can determine probable cause of an accident.

Question: Is it appropriate for the President, or any person or entity other than those employed by the NTSB, to speculate that diversity in the workforce, or any other unfounded factor, is the cause of the Midair Collision of PSA Airlines CRJ700 Airplane and the UH-60 Military Helicopter?

It is not unusual for nonparty members, including members of Congress, governors and members of the media, to comment on investigations before they are complete.

When the NTSB launches to an investigation, we assemble a broad spectrum of technical experts to investigate complex transportation accidents. We designate entities as parties to the investigation whose employees, functions, activities, or products were involved in the accident or incident. This facilitates rapid and complete acquisition of all relevant factual information. Only those entities that can provide technical expertise or knowledge to an NTSB investigation are granted party status, and only those who can provide the NTSB with needed technical expertise or specialized knowledge are permitted to participate in an investigation.

All participants in an NTSB investigation (except for representatives from government agencies and law enforcement agencies, and accredited representatives of foreign governments and their foreign technical advisors) will be required to sign the “Certification of Party Representative,” which is a statement of compliance with NTSB investigation procedures, rules, and restrictions. Representatives from federal regulatory agencies and law enforcement agencies, and accredited representatives of foreign governments and their foreign technical advisors, will be requested to acknowledge the form.

No information may be passed to others within the party’s organization, beyond those individuals actually participating in the NTSB investigation, without the approval of the NTSB’s investigator-in-charge. Only appropriate NTSB personnel are authorized to publicly disclose investigative information, which will be limited to verified factual information identified during the course of the investigation.

To date, no parties of the DCA midair collision investigation have been removed for violating the party agreement. However, an FAA employee who was a member of one of the investigative groups was removed from the investigation for disclosing non-public investigative information. We will promptly inform the Committee if there are any further actions.

Additionally, it is stated above that the NTSB has “not yet asserted that NTSB alone can determine probable cause of an accident.” At the NTSB’s first press conference at DCA, we detailed our investigative process, including that we will determine the probable cause, and reiterated that the NTSB will be the sole source for information about the investigation. That press conference can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d860liUhaWo&t=31s>.

Question: To what extent should parties to the Midair Collision of PSA Airlines CRJ700 Airplane and UH-60 Military Helicopter investigation (including any persons representing the U.S. Army and the Federal Aviation Administration) be citing race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background of people involved in this collision as causes of such a tragedy?

The NTSB is the sole source of public information regarding the progress of an accident investigation. As referred to in the NTSB's Certification of Party Representative, parties to an NTSB investigation are restricted from releasing any investigative information without the NTSB's express approval.

Question: Has the NTSB issued any letters to or issued any public statements correcting any person or entity who has speculated on the cause of the Midair Collision of PSA Airlines CRJ700 Airplane and the UH-60 Military Helicopter and if not, why were multiple warnings issued to the Boeing Company, and not in the case of this investigation?

The Boeing Company is a party to the January 5, 2024, Boeing 737-9 MAX door plug blowout investigation. Under Title 49 *Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)* section 831.11, Boeing was designated as a party to this investigation based on the nature of the incident and because Boeing could provide suitable qualified technical assistance during the NTSB's investigation. As stated in 49 *CFR* 831.13 and reiterated in the Certification of Party Representative, which the Boeing representative signed, parties to an NTSB investigation are restricted from releasing any investigative information without the NTSB's express approval. Before the NTSB's adoption of the final report regarding this incident, only appropriate NTSB personnel are authorized to publicly disclose investigative findings. The party agreement expressly prohibits party participants or their respective organizations from disclosing investigative information. By signing the party agreement, party participants and their organizations agree to comply with the NTSB's requirements and acknowledge that engaging in conduct that is prejudicial to the investigation or otherwise inconsistent with the NTSB's policies or instructions may lead to the loss of party status.

On June 27, 2024, Director of the NTSB's Office of Aviation Safety Tim LeBaron wrote to then-Boeing CEO David Calhoun:

Notwithstanding these requirements [of the signed party agreement], we learned that on June 25, 2024 Ms. Elizabeth Lund, Senior Vice President, Quality, Boeing Commercial Airplanes, gave a long-planned media briefing without the knowledge or consent of the NTSB at which she released non-public investigative information and made unsubstantiated speculations about possible causes of the Jan. 5 door-plug blowout, which is directly at issue in the ongoing investigation. We have verified that part of the released information was either inaccurate or unknown to the NTSB while other parts were not previously disclosed to the public. Such a release or withholding of critical information from our investigators are blatant violations of NTSB's regulations and the party agreement. This disregard of the federal regulations and rules governing NTSB investigations cannot be tolerated.

Boeing had released nonpublic investigative information that was either incorrect or unknown to NTSB investigators 6 months after the accident occurred. This was the second violation of the party agreement by Boeing during the investigation of this incident. Previously, Boeing had publicly confirmed that the paperwork related to maintenance performed on the door plug did not exist—information that had not been shared with our investigators. Additionally, a federal lobbyist for Boeing released investigative information in an email to congressional staff, which was leaked to the press.

NTSB takes action to address violations of party agreements when they occur. In March 2024, we also issued a warning letter to Alaska Airlines regarding release of investigative information to the media related to the door plug blowout investigation.

Question: How does the NTSB define diversity, equity and inclusion and what indicators or factors are NTSB investigators considering as part of its potential causation related to the DCA collision? To what extent does the NTSB intend to investigate the role race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background of air traffic controllers as well as commercial and military pilots that were involved in this tragic collision, may have influenced job performance and where applicable, how does NTSB intend to gather, aggregate, and access data on how these factors influence work performance?

Our investigators consider human performance factors that may contribute to an accident as part of all our investigations. This includes studying crew performance and all before-the-accident factors that might be involved in human error, including fatigue, medication, alcohol and drugs, medical histories, training, workload, equipment design, and work environment. However, aspects of personal identity are generally not the focus of an investigation, as they would not be causal or contributory to an accident.

NTSB Safety Recommendations Issued to DOT and DOT Modal Agencies Since April 1, 2023.

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
H-23-4	DOT	Open— Await Response	Develop and implement a program to determine the prevalence of for-hire motor carriers operating under an agricultural hours-of-service exemption and study their safety performance, including but not limited to (1) fatigue-related crashes, (2) risk of fatigued operation, and (3) adherence to fatigue management principles. Report the findings and any recommendations to improve safety to Congress, as expected in the National Highway System Designation Act, and make them publicly available.
H-23-5	DOT	Open— Await Response	Require interstate motor carriers operating under an agricultural hours-of-service exemption to implement a fatigue management program or, if necessary, seek authority from Congress to do so.
R-24-1	DOT	Open— Await Response	Require the Federal Railroad Administration to issue regulations for inward-facing recorders that include image and audio recordings as recommended by the National Transportation Safety Board in R-24-10 and R-24-11. If necessary, obtain legislative authority to act on this recommendation. (Superseded Safety Recommendation R-19-7)
A-23-1	FAA	Open— Acceptable Response	Require operators of DHC-3 airplanes to install a secondary retention feature on the horizontal stabilizer actuator clamp nut to ensure it remains secured to the barrel in the event the lock ring is not installed or otherwise fails to retain the clamp nut.
A-23-2	FAA	Open— Acceptable Response	Require operators of DHC-3 airplanes to visually inspect both the horizontal stabilizer actuator lock ring and the associated torque seal at an interval that ensures safe flight or until a secondary retention feature is installed.
A-24-2	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Encourage Title 14 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> Part 91K, 135, and 121 operators to incorporate into their standard operating procedures a procedural crosscheck that requires flight crews to verbalize the number of a runway they are about to cross, as indicated by runway signs, unless an installed automated system already provides an aural advisory.
A-24-3	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Encourage Title 14 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> Part 121 operators to use their safety management system to identify flight crew surface navigation errors resulting from the performance of concurrent tasks during taxi and develop and

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
			implement effective risk mitigation strategies considering human factors principles.
A-24-4	FAA	Open— Unacceptable Response	Collaborate with aircraft and avionics manufacturers and software designers to develop the technology for a flight deck system that would provide visual and aural alerts to flight crews of traffic on a runway or taxiway and traffic on approach to land. (Supersedes A-00-66)
A-24-5	FAA	Open— Unacceptable Response	Require that the technology developed in response to Safety Recommendation A-24-4 be installed in all newly certificated transport-category airplanes. (Supersedes A-00-66)
A-24-6	FAA	Open— Unacceptable Response	Require that existing transport-category airplanes be retrofitted with the technology developed in response to Safety Recommendation A-24-4. (Supersedes A-00-66)
A-24-7	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Evaluate the effectiveness of the activation logic for the runway status light system considering the circumstances of this incident.
A-24-8	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Using the findings of the evaluation conducted in response to Safety Recommendation A-24-7, update the runway status light system activation logic as necessary to improve system effectiveness.
A-24-9	FAA	Open— Unacceptable Response	Require retrofit of all cockpit voice recorders (CVR) on all airplanes required to carry both a CVR and a flight data recorder with a CVR capable of recording the last 25 hours of audio. (Supersedes A-18-31)
A-24-10	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	For airports that are certificated under Title 14 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> Part 139 and are currently not equipped with airport surface detection equipment, model X or airport surface surveillance capability, implement surface detection equipment that • tracks the movement of arriving and departing aircraft, • determines the proximity between those aircraft, and • provides air traffic controllers with visual and aural cues of surface movements to aid in their decision making processes.

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
A-24-11	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require air traffic controllers to • advise pilots, through direct communication and automatic terminal information system broadcasts, when visual contact with aircraft operating on taxiways and runways cannot be established or maintained and • instruct pilots to provide accurate position reports to aid the controller in determining an aircraft's location in such conditions.
A-24-12	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Brief all air traffic controllers about the circumstances of this incident, emphasizing the effect that certain conditions might have on a pilot's ability to begin a takeoff in a timely manner, including • low-visibility weather conditions, such as fog; • ambient conditions, such as temperature; and • surface conditions, such as ice, snow, and other precipitation, as noted in Order 7110.65, Air Traffic Control, paragraph 5-8-4, Departure and Arrival.
A-24-13	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Amend the Aeronautical Information Manual so that it instructs pilots to inform controllers, before entering an active runway with the intent to depart, when they need time on the runway for any reason before beginning the takeoff roll.
A-24-14	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require all airports with a Surface Movement Guidance and Control System plan to ensure that their plans and the associated letters of agreement correspond with each other and the stakeholder duties and responsibilities described in Advisory Circular 120-57, Surface Movement Guidance and Control System.
A-24-15	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Direct training administrators at airports with a Surface Movement Guidance and Control System plan to require initial and annual refresher training for all stakeholders, including air traffic controllers and airport operations personnel, on the information in the airport's plan.
A-24-16	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require training administrators at all operating air traffic control towers to conduct annual refresher training on low-visibility operations.

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
A-24-17	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require all Title 14 <i>Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)</i> Part 135 operators, except single-pilot and single-pilot-in-command (PIC) operators, to use certificated dispatchers who hold joint responsibility with the PIC for the safety and operational control of flights and whose responsibilities include preflight planning; flight dispatch, release, and cancellation decisions; and flight monitoring, consistent with the requirements for 14 <i>CFR</i> Part 121 domestic and flag operations.
A-24-18	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Expand the applicability of the load manifest and recordkeeping requirements of Title 14 <i>Code of Federal Regulations (CFR)</i> 135.63(c) to include 14 <i>CFR</i> Part 135 single-engine aircraft operations.
A-24-19	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Develop, validate, and implement a single, unbiased method for generating activity data for all Title 14 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> Part 135 certificate holders, either through mandatory reporting or some other means, to include the identification of activity by certificate type (air carrier or operating), operating authority (on-demand or commuter) and scope (standard, basic, single-pilot, or single-pilot-in-command).
A-24-20	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Review all experimental exhibition airworthiness certificates issued to turbine-powered rotorcraft and ensure that their operating limitations meet the standards of the latest iteration of Federal Aviation Administration Order 8130.2, Airworthiness Certification of Aircraft.
A-24-21	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Establish periodic reviews for experimental exhibition airworthiness certificates to ensure that those aircraft are being inspected and maintained according to the latest iteration of Federal Aviation Administration Order 8130.2, Airworthiness Certification of Aircraft.
A-24-22	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require operators of aircraft equipped with Ozark Aeroworks T53 series engines to perform recurrent inspections of the rear bearing cover and the exhaust diffuser inner cone and inner struts with the exhaust diffuser cover removed.
A-24-23	FAA	Open— Initial	Remind operators of experimental exhibition aircraft about the requirement to submit, to the appropriate flight standards district

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
		Response Received	office, program letters that list all events at which the aircraft will be exhibited.
A-24-24	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Develop a method for ensuring that operators of experimental exhibition aircraft meet their annual obligation to submit program letters; such a method could include potential penalties for operators that do not meet this obligation.
A-24-25	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Revise Federal Aviation Administration Order 8900.1, Flight Standards Information Management System, to include inspector guidance requiring routine surveillance of operators of aircraft with experimental exhibition airworthiness certificates.
A-24-26	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Define the term “instantaneous wind” and develop guidance for pilots on proper use of an instantaneous wind report in operational decision making.
A-24-29	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Determine whether Collins Aerospace SVO 730 rudder rollout guidance actuators with incorrectly assembled bearings should be removed from Boeing 737NG and 737MAX airplanes and, if so, direct US operators to remove the actuators until acceptable replacement actuators become available for installation. (Urgent)
A-24-30	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	If you determine the Collins Aerospace SVO 730 rudder rollout guidance actuators with incorrectly assembled bearings should be removed, notify international regulators that oversee operators of Boeing 737 airplanes about the safety issues involving the SVO-730 rudder rollout guidance actuator and encourage them to require the removal of actuators with incorrectly assembled bearings from 737NG and 737MAX airplanes until an acceptable replacement actuator becomes available for installation. (Urgent)
A-24-31	FAA	Open— Await Response	Work with the International Council of Air Shows Inc. (ICAS) and the warbird community to establish standard operating procedures for air show event organizers and air bosses that include: 1) applying administrative controls to ensure that multiple, dissimilar aircraft not operated as part of an approved maneuvers package remain deconflicted; 2) performing a safety risk assessment for each performance to determine hazards and apply effective mitigations, including consideration for any revenue ride flights conducted during air show operations; and

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
			3) completing a daily debriefing that includes continuous feedback to the Federal Aviation Administration and the ICAS to address any identified deficiencies.
A-24-32	FAA	Open— Await Response	Require recurrent air boss evaluations as part of the letter of authorization renewal process.
A-24-33	FAA	Open— Acceptable Response	Work with the International Council of Air Shows Inc. and other air show industry stakeholders to develop standardized, unambiguous terms to help ensure that the directives that air bosses provide performers, such as those related to show lines, are clear and brief.
A-24-34	FAA	Open— Acceptable Response	Revise Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Order 8900.1 to provide guidance and a job aid for FAA inspectors who evaluate an air boss's performance and require the FAA inspector-in-charge of an air show to observe an air boss's performance visually and on the air boss radio frequency and provide appropriate feedback during the air show debriefing.
A-25-1	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Prohibit operations on Helicopter Route 4 between Hains Point and the Wilson Bridge when runways 15 and 33 are being used for departures and arrivals, respectively, at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA). (Urgent)
A-25-2	FAA	Open— Initial Response Received	Designate an alternative helicopter route that can be used to facilitate travel between Hains Point and the Wilson Bridge when that segment of Route 4 is closed. (Urgent)
H-23-13	FHWA	Closed— Acceptable Action	Develop a risk-based, data-driven process and encourage its use by state Departments of Transportation, as well as highway-bridge-owning federal agencies and tribal governments, to help them identify, prioritize, and perform follow-up actions documented in inspections of bridges with uncoated weathering steel components.
H-24-1	FHWA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require state departments of transportation, as well as federal agencies and tribal communities that own and operate bridges, to conduct a one-time review of the existing fracture-critical member (nonredundant steel tension member) inspection plans for bridges with nonredundant steel frame leg designs in their

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
			inventory, and update these plans as necessary to ensure that all fracture-critical members, especially those in the legs, have been properly identified and accounted for in the fracture-critical member inspection plans and inspections.
H-24-2	FHWA	Open— Initial Response Received	Update your Bridge Inspector's Reference Manual to include guidance that addresses the identification of localized tension zones and tension components in nonredundant steel members that are generally considered to be fully or partially in compression.
H-24-3	FHWA	Open— Initial Response Received	Update your Bridge Inspector's Reference Manual and bridge inspection training courses to include reference material on the selection, frequency of use, and application of non-destructive inspection methods for assessing the wearing surface thickness on bridge decks.
H-24-4	FHWA	Open— Initial Response Received	Establish a process for conducting targeted reviews of the safety issues identified in this investigation, to include at a minimum (1) an evaluation of bridge owners' determinations of the need to conduct new load ratings of bridges with advancing deterioration, and (2) an evaluation of inspection reports on bridges with advanced deterioration to determine if the assumptions and methods used in the load rating calculations are correct; and incorporate the results of these reviews into the National Bridge Inspection Program Compliance Review Manual as necessary.
H-24-5	FHWA	Open— Initial Response Received	Incorporate the findings of the Fern Hollow Bridge collapse investigation into your bridge inspection training courses and use the Fern Hollow Bridge as a case study to emphasize the need to complete maintenance and repair recommendations from inspection reports, follow guidance to ensure that bridge inspections are properly performed, correctly identify fracture-critical members, and correctly calculate load rating analyses.
H-25-1	FHWA	Open— Await Response	In coordination with the US Coast Guard and US Army Corps of Engineers, establish an interdisciplinary team- including representatives from the Federal Highway Administration, US Coast Guard, and US Army Corps of Engineers- and provide guidance and assistance to bridge owners on evaluating and reducing the risk of a bridge collapse from a vessel collision.

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
H-24-19	FMCSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Revise the electronic logging device (ELD) requirements in Title 49 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> Part 395 to require ELD providers to create an audit log that includes: • date, • driver login time and who logged them in, • names of anyone who edited the log, • driver's license numbers, and • active driver list changes.
H-24-25	FMCSA	Open— Await Response	Require new entrant motor carriers to submit a corrective action plan, to be reviewed and approved by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, before they are granted full operating authority if their Safety Measurement System on-road performance data show a pattern of unsafe operation or a high crash-involvement rate.
H-24-26	FMCSA	Open— Unacceptable Response	Incorporate Safety Measurement System on-road performance data into your methodology for determining a motor carrier's fitness to operate. (Supersedes Safety Recommendation H-12-017)
H-24-27	FMCSA	Open— Await Response	Support the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators in developing guidelines—such as requiring and reviewing US Department of Transportation numbers as part of the registration process—for state motor vehicle administrations to identify motor carriers that are subject to a federal out-of-service order and prevent them from registering their commercial motor vehicles in the state.
H-24-28	FMCSA	Open— Await Response	Include provisions in your safety fitness determination rulemaking that prioritize passenger-carrying motor carrier safety performance and ensure increased compliance monitoring and other interventions for these carriers, including more frequent compliance reviews.
R-23-1	FRA	Open— Await Response	Require a limit for maximum acceptable rail wear.
R-23-2	FRA	Open— Await Response	Establish interoperability requirements among railroads to implement a process in which a predetermined critical alert from a vehicle/track interaction system would require an immediate

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
			slow order that remains in place until a walking inspection is performed and, if needed, subsequent repairs are completed.
R-23-3	FRA	Open— Await Response	Require that the continuously welded rail installation requirements of Title 49 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> 213.119 (c)(2) be applied to all continuously welded rail joints, including those added to install maintenance rail.
R-23-7	FRA	Open— Await Response	Complete and publish the results of current research into positive train control technologies to prevent train-to-train collisions during restricted speed operations.
R-23-8	FRA	Open— Await Response	Once the results of this research are available, develop a plan to implement any promising positive train control technologies for train-to-train collision avoidance.
R-23-9	FRA	Open— Await Response	Work with railroads to remove terminal exceptions currently granted under Title 49 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> 236.1019 using available improved positive train control—related technologies.
R-23-10	FRA	Open— Await Response	Work with railroads to remove terminal exceptions currently granted under Title 49 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> 236.1019 using available improved positive train control—related technologies. (Supersedes Safety Recommendation R-20-18)
R-23-11	FRA	Open— Await Response	Require railroads to implement technologies that eliminate the risk of miscommunication between dispatchers and roadway workers in charge regarding established working limits and positive train control protection.
R-23-12	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Work with the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to develop and publish benchmark service and survival temperatures for gaskets to be used in tank cars used in flammable liquid service that reflect currently available gasket materials.
R-23-13	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Work with the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to develop and publish thermal performance standards for gaskets used in tank cars in flammable liquid service that address both accident and normal transportation conditions.

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
R-23-19	FRA	Open— Await Response	Revise 49 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> 218.99(c)(4)(iv) to require ground protection when conducting shoving movements through highway-railroad grade crossings equipped only with flashing lights or passive warning devices.
R-23-22	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require all newly manufactured and all rebuilt and remanufactured roadway maintenance machines to be equipped with backup cameras.
R-23-23	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Issue a safety alert to railroads regarding the importance of establishing roadway maintenance machine standoff distances that take into account the ability of an operator to see a worker or object in the track gauge behind a roadway maintenance machine.
R-24-2	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Research the effectiveness of current bearing defect detection systems, identify minimum standards to protect railroad personnel and the public, and make public the results of this research.
R-24-3	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Use the results of the research described in R-24-2 to develop and establish minimum requirements for bearing defect detection systems, including criteria for bearing alert and alarm thresholds and maximum distances between wayside detectors.
R-24-4	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Establish requirements for the installation, inspection, and maintenance of wayside bearing defect detectors to protect the reliability of these devices and improve the safety of railroad operations.
R-24-5	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Use the results of the research described in R-24-2 to develop and establish rules governing railroads' operational responses to bearing alerts and alarms.
R-24-6	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Monitor the progress of the Association of American Railroads' (AAR) action on R-24-20 and use your regulatory authority to ensure that the AAR addresses weaknesses in its tank car service equipment approval process.
R-24-7	FRA	Open— Initial	Distribute the public versions of your 2007 vent and burn reports to emergency responder associations, including the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
		Response Received	Association of Fire Fighters, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.
R-24-8	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Update and re publish your 2007 vent and burn reports to include clear instructions to consult the shipper when considering a vent and burn, more comprehensive guidance on what products are candidates for a vent and burn along with what chemical and other hazards may result, and an updated process flow chart incorporating lessons from the East Palestine vent and burn; the re published reports should identify the questions an incident commander should ask when considering a vent and burn, distinguish the meaning of the answers, and identify the resources necessary to make an informed decision.
R-24-9	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Make the updated versions of the 2007 vent and burn reports described in R-24-8 available to emergency responder associations, including the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Fire Fighters, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.
R-24-10	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require the installation, in all controlling locomotive cabs and cab car operating compartments, of crash and fire protected inward- and outward-facing audio and image recorders capable of providing recordings to verify that train crew actions are in accordance with rules and procedures that are essential to safety as well as train conditions. The devices should have a minimum 12-hour continuous recording capability with recordings that are easily accessible for review, with appropriate limitations on public release, for the investigation of accidents or for use by management in carrying out efficiency testing and systemwide performance monitoring programs. If necessary, obtain legislative authority to act on this recommendation. (Supersedes Safety Recommendation R-10-001)
R-24-11	FRA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require that railroads regularly review and use in-cab audio and image recordings (with appropriate limitations on public release), in conjunction with other performance data, to verify that train crew actions are in accordance with rules and procedures that are essential to safety. If necessary, obtain legislative authority to act on this recommendation. (Supersedes safety recommendation R-10-002)

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
H-23-14	NHTSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require as standard equipment in all new vehicles intelligent speed assistance systems that, at a minimum, warn the driver when the vehicle exceeds the speed limit.
H-23-15	NHTSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Develop a communication plan to educate the public about the capabilities and benefits of intelligent speed assistance to mitigate speeding.
H-23-16	NHTSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Update the Uniform Guidelines for State Highway Safety Programs to include identification and tracking of repeat speeding offenders.
H-23-17	NHTSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Develop countermeasures to reduce speeding recidivism, determine their effectiveness, and then disseminate the results.
H-23-18	NHTSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Conduct research and develop guidelines to assist states in implementing pilot intelligent speed assistance interlock programs, limiting the vehicle speed, for repeat speeding offenders.
I-24-1	PHMSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Require that placards be able to survive fires and accidents and remain legible during such emergencies long enough to fulfill their functions as described in the Emergency Response Guidebook.
P-24-1	PHMSA	Closed— Acceptable Action	Audit Beta Offshore's drug-testing program to ensure compliance with postaccident drug-testing regulations.
P-24-2	PHMSA	Open— Await Response	Issue an advisory bulletin to all Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration-regulated pipeline owners and operators, promoting the benefits of pipeline safety management systems and asking them to develop and implement such a system based on American Petroleum Institute Recommended Practice 1173.
R-23-14	PHMSA	Open— Initial	Work with the Federal Railroad Administration to develop and publish benchmark service and survival temperatures for gaskets

Rec #	Recipient	Status	Safety Recommendation Text
		Response Received	to be used in tank cars used in flammable liquid service that reflect currently available gasket materials.
R-23-15	PHMSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Work with the Federal Railroad Administration to develop and publish thermal performance standards for gaskets used in tank cars in flammable liquid service that address both accident and normal transportation conditions.
R-23-16	PHMSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Revise the DOT-117 specification in 49 <i>Code of Federal Regulations</i> 179.202-6 to ensure that DOT-117 tank cars incorporate thermal protection systems appropriate to non-pressure tank cars so that service equipment is thermally protected.
R-24-12	PHMSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Obtain the necessary legislative authority and accelerate the deadline for removing specification DOT 111 tank cars from flammable liquids service.
R-24-13	PHMSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Establish a tank car replacement schedule whereby non-pressure tank cars in any hazardous materials service must meet or exceed the safety standards of the DOT-117 specification; if necessary, obtain legislative authority to act on this recommendation.
R-24-14	PHMSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Revise the definition of high hazard flammable train to account for differences in survivability between tank car specifications and to include hazardous materials other than flammable liquids, such as combustible liquids and Division 2.1 flammable gases, that can contribute to cascading hazardous materials releases; if necessary, obtain legislative authority to act on this recommendation.
R-24-15	PHMSA	Open— Initial Response Received	Distribute the Federal Railroad Administration's most current guidance on the vent and burn method to emergency response agencies by referencing it in the next edition of the Emergency Response Guidebook.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

MEMBER DAY

Mr. WOMACK. The subcommittee will come to order. Good morning. Welcome to this year's Member Day Hearing. Today, we welcome our colleagues to testify on their priorities for the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Transportation for fiscal year 2026.

Member engagement is key to the appropriations process and especially important for our bill because every district has housing, transportation assets, and as a result of that, they have needs. As a former mayor, I value the local perspective from districts Nationwide. That is why I am looking forward to hearing from our colleagues this morning.

So before we get into the testimony, I would like to recognize the ranking member, the gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Clyburn, if he has any comments he would like to offer before we get into member testimony.

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WOMACK. Just hit that button over there. There you go. That one.

Mr. CLYBURN. Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

As you have stated, this subcommittee provides funding for vital programs that impact every district across this country. Programs throughout this bill create opportunities for everyday Americans that include stable housing for seniors and growing families, pathways for homeownership and wealth building, job growth and self-sufficiency, transportation, and air safety. We welcome feedback on how we can work on a bipartisan basis to support the work of members of this body, Department of Transportation, Housing and Development, and the other independent agencies. I look forward to hearing from our colleagues today, and I thank you for your leadership.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Clyburn.

Today we kick off with the gentlelady from Illinois, Delia Ramirez. Welcome to this subcommittee. Every member will have the standard 5 minutes to testify. Your full written remarks will be included in the record. And we want you to remember to turn the microphone on when you speak and when you leave, turn it off, and things will go just great here this morning. So, Congresswoman Ramirez, I am going to recognize you for 5 minutes.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

WITNESS

**HON. DELIA C. RAMIREZ, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF ILLINOIS**

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Thank you, Chairman Womack and Ranking Member Clyburn, and our vice chair, who is also here with us today, for creating a space for members to provide input into the appropriation process and to also be able to provide the written testimony on the agencies and the programs under the jurisdiction of the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Program Subcommittee.

I would like to start by stating that I am deeply concerned about the state of housing in our country, particularly in light of the recent ongoing actions of the administration that feel like they are weakening the housing workforce and abandoning some of our most vulnerable residents. Since January 20th, we have witnessed the dismantling of the Department of Housing and Development. The administration has doled out some executive orders and others that we have seen already have reduced staff at HUD, we have seen freezes and delays in Federal funding to housing programs and the release guidance that severely undermines housing protections for some of the most underserved communities in our country. And that includes veterans and individuals with disabilities.

As members of Congress, it is our responsibility to ensure that the funds we appropriate are honored by the Executive Branch and that, in this moment, it feels like we are not ceding Congressional power to the whims and interests of billionaires at the expense of working families. I want to tell you why I think this.

In the state of Illinois, almost 400,000 people rely on subsidized housing. 400,000. There has been at least \$60 million in funding that have been thrown into limbo due to the directives of the Trump Administration. Funding uncertainties and contract cancellations delay install necessary housing developments that our communities have desperately needed for so many years. And it feels unconscionable that at a time where we need housing so much, we would be stalling these projects.

The attacks on HUD and its programs are not just attacks on our working families, but they are attacks on the infrastructure of our country. The attacks on HUD are intentional attacks on civil rights and legal protections, particularly for historically marginalized communities. Constituents and stakeholders have shared their fear and their uncertainty regarding the future of housing opportunities, especially for persons with AIDS, through the HOPWA program and their Fair Housing Initiative Program. The HOPWA program has established—was established to provide housing assistance and related supportive services to low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families. And as a proud supporter of AIDS Chicago and AIDS United, it is imperative that our neighbors living with HIV/AIDS continue to receive the lifesaving support, including housing. Any attack on HOPWA is an attack on the Black and Brown communities that are disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Furthermore, I learned that in February this administration canceled 78 Fair Housing Initiative Program grants. The programs contribute to the creation of equitable and fair access to housing. The services provided by Fair Housing Centers are indispensable to a large and diverse set of Americans, including but not limited to African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other racial and ethnic minorities who have historically faced systemic discrimination in Chicago and in housing as a whole. Persons with disabilities seeking accessibility and reasonable accommodation and housing under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA). And families who have been denied access to housing because they have children.

Our investments in fair housing and housing opportunities for underserved populations are not wasteful. They provide essential foundational stability that enables our neighbors across the Nation to fully engage in their lives and in their communities. What is wasteful is tax breaks for billionaires, billions spent criminalizing immigrants, and millions spent on ad campaigns to televise authoritarian agendas. We cannot put Americans first while also cutting housing programs that are critical to our Americans.

Instead, we are here talking about cuts that would actually critically impact so many people, not just in Chicago, but across the country. It is why I wanted to testify here today and tell you, as someone that ran a homeless shelter, as someone that worked really hard in providing permanent, stable housing, we have a moral responsibility to save these programs, to provide permanent, stable housing.

And I want to urge this subcommittee to fight for adequate and sustained funding for these housing programs while also defining congressional intent for the funds to ensure that they are protected from further misguided action by this administration.

Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Ranking Member. And with that, I yield back.

[The information follows:]

TESTIMONY FOR THE RECORD
House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
(THUD)

CONGRESSWOMAN DELIA C. RAMIREZ

MEMBER DAY: April 9, 2025

Thank you, Chair Womack and Ranking Member Clyburn, for inviting Members to provide input into the Appropriations process and to provide written testimony on the agencies and programs under the jurisdiction of the Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development, and Related Programs Subcommittee.

I am deeply concerned about the state of housing in our country, particularly in light of the recent, ongoing actions of the Trump Administration to weaken the housing workforce and abandon our most vulnerable residents. Since January 20th, we have witnessed the dismantling of the Department of Housing and Development (HUD). The Musk-Trump administration has doled out executive order after order to reduce staff at HUD, freeze and delay federal funding to housing programs, and release guidance that severely undermines housing protections for our underserved communities, including veterans and individuals with disabilities. As Members of Congress, it is our responsibility to ensure that the funds we appropriate are honored by the Executive Branch and that, in this moment, we are not ceding Congressional power to the whims and interests of billionaires like Musk and Trump at the expense of working families.

In the state of Illinois, almost 400,000 people rely on subsidized housing.¹ There has been at least 60 million dollars in funding thrown into limbo due to the directives of the Trump

¹ <https://usafacts.org/answers/how-many-people-live-in-subsidized-housing/state/illinois/>

Administration. Funding uncertainties and contract cancellations delay and stall necessary housing development in our communities. It is unconscionable.

The attacks on HUD and its programs are not just an attack on working families. The attacks on HUD are intentional attacks on the civil rights of and legal protections for historically marginalized communities. Constituents and stakeholders have shared their fear and uncertainty regarding the future of Housing Opportunities for Persons with Aids (HOPWA) and the Fair Housing Initiatives Program. The HOPWA program was established to provide housing assistance and related supportive services for low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families. As a proud supporter of AIDS Chicago and AIDS United, it is imperative that our neighbors living with HIV/AIDS continue to receive life saving support, including housing. Any attack on HOPWA is an attack on the Black and Brown communities, who are disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Furthermore, I learned that in February this Administration cancelled 78 Fair Housing Initiative Program (FHIP) grants. The FHIP program contributes to the creation of equitable and fair access to housing. The services provided by fair housing centers are indispensable to a large and diverse set of Americans, including but not limited to:

- African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and other racial and ethnic minorities who have historically faced systemic discrimination in housing.
- Persons with disabilities seeking accessibility and reasonable accommodation in housing under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Families who have been denied access to housing because they have children.

Our investments in Fair Housing and housing opportunities for underserved populations are not wasteful - they provide essential, foundational stability that enables our neighbors across the nation to fully engage in the life of their communities. What is wasteful is the Musk and Trump tax breaks for billionaires, billions spent criminalizing immigrants, and millions spent on ad campaigns to televise their authoritarian agenda. Trump and Musk aren't putting Americans first with their reckless and irresponsible cuts to HUD. They aren't saving you money, making good use of your tax dollars, or lowering your rent. Instead, they are cutting critical programs that serve our most vulnerable communities to line their own pockets.

I urge you to fight for adequate and sustained funding for these housing programs, while also defining Congressional intent for the funds to ensure they are protected from further misguided action by the Trump Administration.

Mr. WOMACK. We thank you for your testimony this morning. Many times when members are offering testimony, there aren't any questions. But I am always going to yield to my colleagues that are here today. If they have any questions, you can feel free to ask away. So, you good? You good?

Mr. CLYBURN. I don't have any questions. I would like to say to the gentlelady that I applaud her stance on disabilities. I ran such an agency in my former life for 18 years in South Carolina, and I am the creator of the South Carolina bill for handicapped citizens. And I understand, Mr. Chairman, that less than 5 percent of all the housing in this country is accessible to the disabled. And I applaud your concern for this. And I just want to say, Mr. Chairman, that I am a big proponent of us not cutting back on funds that will allow disabled people in wheelchairs. And I can remember when we would not even lower buttons on the elevator for dwarfs. These kinds of things, I think, will work to get beyond that. Thank you, and I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Ms. Ramirez. Our next witness this morning is the member representing the 4th District of New York, the Honorable Laura A. Gillen. Rep. Gillen, your comments, your prepared testimony will be included in the record. You will have 5 minutes. Just turn the mic on when you start and off when you leave, and the floor is yours.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

WITNESS

**HON. LAURA GILLEN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF NEW YORK**

Ms. GILLEN. Well, thank you, Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and other members of the subcommittee. I am grateful for the opportunity to appear before you today to highlight several important issues affecting my constituents in New York's 4th Congressional District, which is on the south shore of Nassau County on Long Island.

Mr. Chairman, we face a major crisis on our roads on Long Island with an alarming and unacceptable rise in fatal crashes in recent years. In fact, every 7 minutes on Long Island there is another car accident involving death, injury, or serious property damage. According to our local paper Newsday, more than 2,100 people have been killed and 16,000 have been severely injured in traffic accidents on Long Island's dangerous roads over the past 10 years.

We can and we must do more to prevent these terrible tragedies and save lives. That is why I strongly urge members of this subcommittee to increase funding for road safety, including the Bridge Investment Program, Safe Streets and Roads for All Program, and the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

Earlier this year, the New York State Department of Transportation released data finding that 10 bridges on Long Island are in poor condition, including a bridge in the Village of Hewlett Harbor, which is in my district. We need to increase Bridge Investment

Program funding over—under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in fiscal year 2026, and I will be leading a letter with my colleagues urging this committee to do just that.

In addition, programs like Safe Streets and Highway Safety Improvement Program have helped improve and modernize our transportation network, and I am committed to working in a bipartisan manner to continue successful initiatives to prevent fatal accidents and keep Americans safe on our roadways.

I also request your support for vital community project funding in fiscal year 2026, which provides direct Federal assistance to towns and villages across my district to invest in critical infrastructure upgrades that increase the safety and the reliability of our transportation system.

I would also like to highlight the critical importance of HUD Economic Development Initiative grants which fall under this subcommittee's jurisdiction. EDI grants fund a wide range of projects that benefit our communities and help grow our economy.

Last year, the House Appropriations Committee passed an fiscal year 2025 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, which included more than \$21 million for eight projects in the 4th Congressional District. Unfortunately, this funding and \$30 million in direct funding slated to go to my district was ultimately stripped from the full-year fiscal year 2025 continuing resolution that was passed by Congress last month.

For fiscal year 2026, I urge the committee and all my colleagues in Congress to support vital projects in my district and across our country. I know there is strong support for this effort on both sides of the aisle. I will work with anyone in any party who is serious about bringing their necessary resources back to my district, on Long Island, and throughout the United States to fund these important projects.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, I thank you so much for your time today, for your work on this committee to help serve the American people. I look forward to working with all of you to make the communities that we represent more vibrant and safer places to live. Thank you. I yield back.

[The information follows:]

Testimony of The Honorable Laura A. Gillen (NY-04)
“Member Day Hearing”
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development
April 9, 2025

Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to highlight several important issues affecting my constituents in the Fourth Congressional District of New York, on the South Shore of Nassau County on Long Island.

Mr. Chairman, we face a major crisis on our roads on Long Island, with an alarming and unacceptable rise in fatal crashes in recent years. In fact, every seven minutes on Long Island, there is another car accident involving death, injury, or serious property damage. According to *Newsday* more than 2,100 people have been killed and 16,000 have been severely injured in traffic accidents on Long Island’s dangerous roads over the past ten years.

We can and must do more to prevent these terrible tragedies and save lives. That is why I strongly urge members of this subcommittee to increase funding for road safety, including the Bridge Investment Program, Safe Streets and Roads for All Program (SS4A), and the Highway Safety Improvement Program.

Earlier this year, the New York State Department of Transportation released data finding that 10 bridges on Long Island are in poor condition, including a bridge in the Village of Hewlett Harbor in the Fourth Congressional District. We need to increase Bridge Investment Program funding under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in FY26, and I will be leading a letter with my colleagues urging this Committee to do just that.

In addition, programs like SS4A and the Highway Safety Improvement Program have helped improve and modernize our transportation network, and I am committed to working in a bipartisan manner to continue successful initiatives to prevent fatal accidents and keep Americans safe on our roads.

I also request your support for vital community project funding in FY26, which provides direct Federal assistance to towns across my district to invest in critical infrastructure upgrades that increase the safety and reliability of our transportation system.

I would also like to highlight the critical importance of HUD Economic Development Initiative grants which fall under this subcommittee’s jurisdiction. EDI grants fund a wide range of projects that benefit our communities and help grow our economy.

Last year, the House Appropriations Committee passed an FY25 Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development Appropriations bill which included more than \$21 million for eight projects in the Fourth Congressional District. Unfortunately, this funding -- and \$30 million in direct

funding slated to go to my district -- was ultimately stripped from the full-year FY25 continuing resolution that Congress passed last month.

For FY26, I urge the Committee, and all my colleagues in Congress, to support vital projects in my district and across our country. I know there is strong support for this effort of both sides of the aisle. I will work with anyone, in either party, who's serious about bringing these necessary resources back to Long Island.

Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you for your time today and for your work on this Committee to help serve the American people. I look forward to working with you and with all of our colleagues to make the communities I represent on Long Island safer, more vibrant places to live.

Mr. WOMACK. We are grateful for your testimony. Questions? Comments? Mr. Clyburn.

Mr. CLYBURN. Oh, I haven't got questions. I want to thank the gentlelady for being here today. And looking at your testimony, I see why your son is now living in the 6th Congressional District of South Carolina. And we—

Mr. WOMACK. Oh, that was shameless.

Ms. GILLEN. Very privileged to have that honor.

Mr. CLYBURN. He is a great intern. Thank you so much. And in my office in Columbia.

Mr. WOMACK. Anything, Stephanie?

Ms. BICE. Thank you for the testimony. And as someone who has driven on the roads of Long Island, my father used to live in—the area, I agree with you. And I would also say the safety is incredibly important across the country. I have a great relationship with my folks back home in the transportation industry, and it is, I think, somewhat surprising to folks when they hear the number of deaths of construction workers who are actually working on road and bridge projects across the country. So not only should we be focusing on making sure that transportation safety is important, but also that we are protecting our construction workers as they are working to improve roads and bridges across the country. With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you. Grateful for your testimony. Before you leave, let me just say I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge—totally unrelated to the hearing today—the tremendous sportsmanship, the credible sportsmanship, given the Washington Capitals and Ovechkin for the breaking of the record, which he did in New York and delayed the completion of that game. I am not a huge hockey fan, but I was glued to the television watching that. And throughout the entire process, I thought what a great display of sportsmanship that was given by the people at that hockey arena on Sunday. And that was a credit, and I am sure a lot of your constituents—I don't know who represents that area.

Ms. GILLEN. I represent that district. The arena is in my district. I was at the game. It was very exciting when he—when Ovechkin scored that goal, everybody in the arena was a Capitals fan and just really impressed. And it was—it was a wonderful thing to behold.

Mr. WOMACK. America needs more of that.

Ms. GILLEN. I agree.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you very much.

Ms. GILLEN. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. WOMACK. Our next witness is the Honorable Maxine Waters. And as she takes her position at the table, your prepared comments will be inserted into the record. You will have 5 minutes, so turn that mic on when you start and off when you are finished. And, Rep. Waters, you are recognized.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

WITNESS

**HON. MAXINE WATERS, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS
FROM THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

Ms. WATERS. There it is. Thank you. Good morning, Chair Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and members of the subcommittee. I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify today on one of the most important issues facing our country.

As ranking member and former chairwoman of the House Financial Services Committee, I have come to know all too well the struggles families are facing in today's housing market. Americans are spending more of their paychecks on their rent and mortgage than ever before. Homelessness is rising and our Nation's housing is increasingly being purchased not by families, but private equity funds with all-cash offers.

For decades, the U.S. under-produced housing for hard working families while making it easier for corporations and flippers to scoop up more single-family homes than ever. We haven't built enough housing since President Roosevelt's New Deal and we certainly haven't built enough since the 2008 Great Recession. It is no wonder since the federal housing budget has represented less than 2 percent of all federal outlays since fiscal year 1986 and the fiscal year 2024 housing budget isn't even 1 percent. This lack of investment has directly resulted in our Nation's public housing failing to disrepair, people waiting years to get housing assistance they are owed under the law, and first-time and often first-generation home buyers having insurmountable obstacles to achieving the American dream.

And so, while I know that every member of this subcommittee is concerned about this and is looking for solutions, I am concerned that the situation will only get much worse as this President's reckless tariff plan goes into effect. The President's tariffs on the world, but in particular Mexico and Canada, are going to significantly increase the cost of building and repairing homes. Trump's gutting of consumer protection and civil rights enforcement and housing will allow landlords and banks to lock more people out of housing and increase rents without Federal oversight.

Meanwhile, Elon Musk's DOGE has infiltrated our Nation's housing agencies, stealing funding Congress provided to communities, illegally terminating staff, including in your districts, and accessing confidential data about people living in assisted housing, including sexual assault survivors. I am concerned that all of this makes it possible for Elon Musk and the other billionaires in Trump's cabinet to achieve their goal to help their Billionaire Boys Club get rich quick off of America's housing.

The recently passed appropriations bill has the potential to make this a reality. The funding year 2025 continuing resolution slashed 500 million from the Federal housing budget and is expected to put at least 32,000 families at risk of eviction and homelessness. And the housing that they vacate will be ripe for the picking by private equity, hedge funds, and others who don't believe that everyone in America should have a right to affordable housing.

So I am here today to request that the committee increase all housing accounts well beyond funding year 2024 funding levels so that we can meet the growing needs of this country. For a start, the committee could consider my Housing Crisis Response Act, which provides more than \$150 billion in investments for fair and affordable housing. My bill outlines a plan for which Congress should fund housing so we can build more affordable homes, bring down the cost of rent, and revive the dream of home ownership for all.

So, in addition to funding above funding year 2024 levels, I specifically request the following.

First, \$10 billion for the HOME Program and \$500 million for each of the Section 202 and Section 811 Program accounts to help increase the supply of homes that are accessible and affordable to families, including seniors and people with disabilities.

\$24 billion for the Housing Choice Voucher Program to help Americans afford their rent and avoid eviction.

\$65 billion to address capital backlog needs in public housing that put the health and safety of residents at risk on a daily basis.

And \$8 billion for emergency housing vouchers to help house people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Together, we can secure fair and affordable housing in every community across this great country. With that, I want to thank you for holding today's hearing, and I yield back my time.

[The information follows:]



U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES
– RANKING MEMBER MAXINE WATERS –
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING, AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
 APRIL 4, 2025

Good morning, Chair Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on one of the most important issues facing our country: housing.

As Ranking Member and former Chairwoman of the House Financial Services Committee, I've come to know all too well the struggles families are facing in today's housing market. Americans are spending more of their paychecks on their rent and mortgage than ever before, homelessness is rising, and our nation's housing is increasingly being purchased not by families, but by private equity funds with all-cash offers.

For decades, the U.S. has under-produced housing for hard-working families, while making it easier for corporations and flippers to scoop up more single-family homes than ever. We haven't built enough housing since President Roosevelt's New Deal and we certainly haven't built enough since the 2008 Great Recession. It's no wonder, since the federal housing budget has represented less than 2 percent of all federal outlays since Fiscal Year 1986 and the Fiscal Year 2024 housing budget isn't even 1 percent. This lack of investment has directly resulted in our nation's public housing falling into disrepair, people waiting years to get housing assistance they are owed under the law, and first-time and often first-generation homebuyers having insurmountable obstacles to achieving the American dream.

While I know that every Member of this Subcommittee is concerned by this and is looking for solutions, I'm concerned that the situation will only get much worse as Trump's reckless tariff plan goes into effect. Trump's tariffs on the world, but in particular on Mexico and Canada, are going to significantly increase the costs of building and repairing homes. Trump's gutting of consumer protections and civil rights enforcement in housing will allow landlords and banks to lock more people out of housing and increase rents without federal oversight.

Meanwhile, Co-President Elon Musk's DOGE has infiltrated our nation's housing agencies, stealing funding Congress provided to communities, illegally terminating staff, including in your districts, and accessing confidential data about people living in assisted housing, including sexual assault survivors. I'm concerned that all of this makes it possible for Elon Musk and the other billionaires in Trump's cabinet to achieve their goal to help their Billionaire Boys Club get rich quick off of America's housing.

The recently passed appropriations bill has the potential to make this a reality. The FY25 continuing resolution slashed \$500 million from the federal housing budget and is expected to put at least 32,000 families at risk of eviction and homelessness. And the housing that they vacate will be ripe for the picking by private equity, hedge funds, and others who don't believe that everyone in America should have a right to affordable housing.

So, I am here today to request that the Committee increase all housing accounts well beyond the FY 2024 funding levels so we can meet the growing needs of this country. For a start, the Committee could consider my Housing Crisis Response Act which provides more than \$150 billion in investments for fair and affordable housing. My bill outlines a plan by which Congress should fund housing so we can build more affordable homes, bring down the cost of rent, and revive the dream of homeownership for all.

In addition to full funding above FY 2024 levels, I specifically request the following:

- \$10 billion for the HOME Program and \$500 million for each of the Section 202 and Section 811 Program accounts to help increase the supply of homes that are accessible and affordable to families, including seniors and people with disabilities;
- \$24 billion for the Housing Choice Voucher Program to help Americans afford their rent and avoid eviction;
- \$65 billion to address capital backlog needs in Public Housing that put the health and safety of residents at risk on a daily basis; and
- \$8 billion for Emergency Housing Vouchers to help house people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Together, we can secure fair and affordable housing in every community across this great country. With that, I thank Members for holding today's hearing and I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you very much, Representative Waters. Anybody? Comments? Questions?

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, I want to thank you so much for being here.

Ms. WATERS. Yes.

Mr. CLYBURN. Congresswoman Waters, you and I have talked about this for years, and I want you to know that I share your concern for affordable, accessible housing for all.

I am particularly interested in what is happening now as it relates to housing in Columbia. I live in a community where it was the first "subdivision" that Blacks were allowed access to housing. And I have been in there ever since I have been in Columbia. And what has happened there now, Mr. Chairman, is that a lot of those public school teachers, postal workers who have retired and are now living basically on small retirements and Social Security, every time I go home, there are at least two letters in my mailbox from hedge funds wanting to purchase my house. And all the people in the neighborhood are getting those letters. They aren't buying these houses to live in. They are buying these houses, in my not so humble opinion, to deprive these senior citizens living in retirement dependent upon Social Security when they find themselves in need of resources, they are going to sell. And I think that that is very, very unfair, and there is something sinister about that.

And so, I want to work with you and with this committee because you have had hearings on evictions and this kind of thing. And this is something I think we need to focus on because that is a shame. But it is taking place throughout. I am sure it is more than my community. And I thank you for your testimony.

Ms. WATERS. You are so welcome.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Clyburn. Ms. Bice.

Ms. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your testimony this morning. I think we would be remiss if we didn't also talk about the other factors in purchasing a home. I have been considering whether or not to move from the home that my husband and I have had for 18 years and raised our two daughters in. And the two factors that have changed in the last few years that have made it, in my opinion, much more unaffordable to purchase a new home are interest rates, of course, at 7 percent and insurance. You know, my homeowner's insurance has increased extraordinarily over the last couple of years. Yes, I live in Tornado Alley. But unfortunately, that also has a factor in whether or not individuals can afford to purchase a home. So I hope if we are going to have a conversation, that those two factors are also part of that discussion. So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you. Ms. Waters, thank you so much for your testimony this morning.

Ms. WATERS. You are welcome. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. Our next witness is the at-large member from the great state of Wyoming, Representative Harriet Hageman. And Rep. Hageman, you are recognized for 5 minutes, knowing that your prepared remarks will be included in the record, and the floor is yours. Thank you.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

WITNESS

**HON. HARRIET M. HAGEMAN, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF WYOMING**

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you, and thank you for this opportunity. Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and members of the subcommittee, I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today for the subcommittee's Member Day hearing regarding issues of great importance pertaining to the success of Wyoming's air service.

Despite Wyoming being one of the most rural states in the United States, our air service actually dates back nearly 100 years to when the City of Cheyenne became a principal stop on the new U.S. Air Mail Service route. Since then, air service in Wyoming has flourished and remains a major contributor to the statewide and local economies.

According to the Wyoming Department of Transportation, or YDOT, total Wyoming passengers numbered over 1.6 million in 2024. Commercial air services' annual economic impacts exceed \$1.5 billion and support over 17,000 jobs statewide. To accommodate this increasing level of demand, Wyoming boasts nine commercial service airports, including one international airport and the only airport in the entire country that is located within a National park. Advocating for meaningful investment in Federal programs that seek to build upon this momentum and not only preserve but expand rural air service should always remain a priority as we craft our appropriations bills.

Last year, in a bipartisan fashion, Congress passed the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, which, among other valuable provisions, increased the authorization of the Airport Improvement Program, or AIP, from \$3.35 to \$4 billion. The importance of the AIP funding in Wyoming cannot be overstated as it has repeatedly supported essential airport infrastructure projects, including expanding terminal buildings, rehabilitating aprons, taxiways, and runway lighting, and acquiring snow removal and firefighting equipment, all of which are essential to increasing air traffic capacity and mitigating hazards caused by unpredictable weather, which is simply a fact of life throughout Wyoming and the Greater Intermountain West. Failure to adequately fund this program will make it far more difficult for rural airports to maintain their existing infrastructure and accommodate future growth, which will inevitably trickle down to all communities and local businesses that rely upon air service for revenue generated through tourism, freight, and other means.

Just as important as our airport infrastructure is the ability to grow and retain a pipeline of aviation professionals to carry out the critical functions necessary for the continuation of air service. It is no secret that we continue to struggle with Nationwide aviation workforce shortages, particularly when it comes to pilots and aviation maintenance technicians. Unfortunately, these deficiencies are uniquely amplified in a state as rural as Wyoming, where the lack of a stable workforce can detrimentally impact the timeliness and quality of our air service, if not resulting in its loss altogether. As

of 2020, there were a total of 2,254 aviation employees in Wyoming. Initiatives such as the FAA's Aviation Workforce Development Programs can go a long way to helping fill employment gaps while recruiting and educating the next generation of aviation professionals. Wyoming is a prime example of these objectives as there continues to be a growing interest in my state for expanding aviation career technical education opportunities, including through new K-12 internship programs and post-secondary pathways to obtain applied sciences degrees in aviation and aeronautics and commercial pilot certificates.

Finally, I would like to briefly touch on the issue of assisting smaller communities who are actively seeking to attract increased commercial air service and minimize higher airfares through the Small Community Air Service Development Program. Multiple communities across my state are actively competing with other locations Nationwide to obtain commercial air service routes, which are almost always in short supply and can be financially burdensome to maintain over a longer period. Initiatives such as the Small Community Air Service Development Program are integral in allowing smaller communities to compete in the rural air service market through revenue guarantees, marketing agreements and the completion of necessary studies.

As previously stated, these are just a few of the many programs and resources that contribute to the success of Wyoming's air service. Ensuring that we are not only fully funding but also reverting program management back to the core principles laid out under the laws as opposed to unrelated political objectives is crucial to achieving this intended success.

Once again, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify and I look forward to working with each of you as we begin the ever important process of drafting our appropriation bills for fiscal year 26. Thank you.

[The information follows:]

**Member Day Written Testimony - House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation,
Housing and Urban Development**

Rep. Harriet Hageman (WY At-Large)

Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and Members of the subcommittee:

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today for the subcommittee's Member Day hearing regarding issues of great importance pertaining to the success of Wyoming's air service.

Despite Wyoming being one of the most rural states in the U.S., our air service dates back nearly one hundred years when the City of Cheyenne became a principal stop on the new U.S. Air Mail Service route.¹ Since then, air service in Wyoming has flourished and remains a major contributor to the statewide and local economies.

According to the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT), total Wyoming passengers numbered over 1.6 million in 2024. Commercial air services' annual economic impacts exceed \$1.5 billion and support over 17,000 jobs statewide.² To accommodate this increasing level of demand, Wyoming boasts nine commercial service airports, including one international airport and the only airport in the U.S. located within a national park. Advocating for meaningful investment in federal programs that seek to build upon this momentum and not only preserve but expand rural air service should always remain a priority as we craft our appropriations bills.

¹ <https://www.ang.af.mil/Media/Article-Display/Article/435741/aviation-history-wyomings-impact/#:~:text=Cheyenne%20became%20the%20focal%20point,8%2C%201920.>

² <https://www.dot.state.wy.us/files/live/sites/wydot/files/shared/Aeronautics/Economic-Impact/Aviation%20Economic%20Impact%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

Last year, in a bipartisan fashion, Congress passed the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, which, among other valuable provisions, increased the authorization of the Airport Improvement Program (AIP) from \$3.35 to \$4 billion. The importance of AIP funding in Wyoming cannot be overstated as it has repeatedly supported essential airport infrastructure projects—including expanding terminal buildings; rehabilitating aprons, taxiways, and runway lighting; and acquiring snow removal and firefighting equipment—all of which are essential to increasing air traffic capacity and mitigating hazards caused by unpredictable weather, which is simply a fact of life throughout Wyoming and the greater Intermountain West. Failure to adequately fund this program will make it far more difficult for rural airports to maintain their existing infrastructure and accommodate future growth, which will inevitably trickle down to all communities and local businesses that rely upon air service for revenue generated through tourism, freight, and other means.

Just as important as our airport infrastructure is the ability to grow and retain a pipeline of aviation professionals to carry out the critical functions necessary for the continuation of air service. It's no secret that we continue to struggle with nationwide aviation workforce shortages, particularly when it comes to pilots and aviation maintenance technicians. Unfortunately, these deficiencies are uniquely amplified in a state as rural as Wyoming, where the lack of a stable workforce can detrimentally impact the timeliness and quality of our air service, if not resulting in its loss altogether. As of 2020, there were a total of 2,254 aviation employees in Wyoming. Initiatives such as the FAA's Aviation Workforce Development Programs can go a long way to helping fill employment gaps while recruiting and educating the next generation of aviation professionals. Wyoming is a prime example of these objectives as there continues to be a

growing interest in my state for expanding aviation career technical education opportunities, including through new K-12 internship programs and post-secondary pathways to obtain applied science degrees in aviation and aeronautics and commercial pilot certificates.

Finally, I'd like to briefly touch on the issue of assisting smaller communities who are actively seeking to attract increased commercial air service and minimize higher airfares through the Small Community Air Service Development program. Multiple communities across my state are actively competing with other locations nationwide to obtain commercial air service routes, which are almost always in short supply and can be financially burdensome to maintain over a longer period. Initiatives such as the Small Community Air Service Development program are integral in allowing smaller communities to compete in the rural air service market through revenue guarantees, marketing agreements, and the completion of necessary studies.

As previously stated, these are just a few of the many programs and resources that contribute to the success of Wyoming's air service. Ensuring that we are not only fully funding but also reverting program management back to the core principles laid out under the law as opposed to unrelated political objectives is crucial to achieving their intended success. Once again, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to working with each of you as we begin the ever-important process of drafting our appropriations bills for FY26. Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff at any point.

Mr. WOMACK. We appreciate your comments this morning and recognizing the rural nature of your state. I am curious, do you recall right off the bat how many of your commercial service airports get Essential Air Service funding?

Ms. HAGEMAN. I don't know the answer to that, but I could get back to you on it.

Mr. WOMACK. Because that was one of the anomalies that we had in fiscal year 2025 or the fiscal year 2024 continuing resolution to make sure that we had funds flowing to the airports that are serving a very rural population. I have a couple in our state; I think three or four in our state. But I figure some of the ones that you are referring to also are Essential Air Service beneficiaries.

Ms. HAGEMAN. I think so, and pretty much all of my airports are pretty rural.

Mr. WOMACK. Yeah. Questions? Comments? Mr. Clyburn, any?

Mr. CLYBURN. No, sir. Thank you, gentlelady, for your testimony.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. All good? All right. Thank you, Harriet.

Ms. HAGEMAN. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. We appreciate it.

Our last witness, if I am not mistaken, is Jeff Van Drew, who represents the 2nd District in the State of New Jersey. Jeff, your official comments will be included into the record. Just hit the microphone, and for 5 minutes, the floor is yours.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 9, 2025.

WITNESS

**HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW, A REPRESENTATIVE IN
CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY**

Mr. VAN DREW. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, ranking member. Thank you, members of the committee, for having this hearing today.

You know, the FAA Reauthorization of 2024 codified New Jersey's William J. Hughes FAA Technical Center for Advanced Aerospace in Title 49, Section 106 of the U.S. Code. Last year, the committee drafted an fiscal year 2025 bill that included \$62 million for the technical center's laboratories and infrastructure sustainment. This year, I am requesting that the committee continue this momentum by investing the same amount from the facilities and equipment account.

This includes \$6 million for disaster resiliency of critical National aerospace systems to upgrade "Priority One" infrastructure to enhance critical power distribution, providing cooling for essential equipment, and ensure resilient data transmission.

\$29 million for William J. Hughes Technical Center civil service systems sustainment. These funds will design and construct a water supply system and underground utility for all tenants at the technical center, including the Atlantic City Airport.

\$27 million for William J. Hughes Technical Center electrical system sustainment. These funds will design and construct a replacement electrical system to supply power to the airport oper-

ations area, covering all airfield lighting and navigational aids, which obviously are necessary.

These investments, very importantly, will also benefit the many technical center tenants, which includes—but not only—but includes the Coast Guard, the Air National Guard, the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Air Marshals and the Atlantic City airport itself.

I also request that the committee provide \$10 million for the research, engineering, and development account for an emerging technologies accelerator. This provides a pathway for development, demonstration, and transfer of technology that can lead to a tangible operational improvement to the aviation infrastructure.

And my final request on this is related to the technical center for increased technical personnel levels. And I will provide staff with additional information on that as well.

On community projects—and by the way, all this sounds very dry, but basically, it is important for our homeland security, for navigational airspace and obviously for the future that we want to be better and safer. Community project funding. The first request is \$3 million to construct a dental hygiene school—I don't want to hear any jokes. Yes, I am a dentist, but this is really important. At the Atlantic Cape Community College. From the EDI account, there is a serious need for dental hygienists in my area. We are critically short, number one. Secondly, the part of the state that I represent, some of it is some of the least fiscally sound area, has the most financial economic challenges of any part of the State of New Jersey. And this is a wonderful career for people where they can frankly make a good income. It is very much needed. It allows people, if they are going to be doing it full-time or whether they do it part-time, to also have a family and make a decent income. It is a good thing.

And as you know, I spent a good part of my career being a dentist. The more sane part of my career, I might add, was being a dentist. And so, we have a non-Federal match on this of over \$2 million from the Atlanta County government who is very willing to contribute additional construction costs and equipment for this. It is my top request and is an fiscal year 2025 resubmission. Unfortunately, it has to be a resubmission.

The second request is \$3.5 million for EDI funds to the Buena Vista Township Municipal Utility Authority to fund emergency shelter water infrastructure. This project will design and build an expanded water and sewer connection into a local school auditorium. It indeed is also important. This project needs economic development funds because this is the type of water service that does not align with either the Interior or USDA accounts.

The third request is for \$2.5 million to the design and preparation of a site for an aviation maintenance training academy. Again, speaking of what I did do before, we need some good jobs in our area very much. This is a good job. It is a very much—it is a job that is needed in high demand, and we are short of people that can do this work. This would be from the EDI account as well. This project will train generations of much needed aviation maintenance workers. The project is supported importantly by the United States Air Force and also has matching non-Federal funds, private sector

partners that we have already lined up on this as well. They are interested in recruiting from this facility. And again, I am going to say, unfortunately, it is a resubmission from 2025.

And I really thank you all for the work you do and the time you take. Thank you.

[The information follows:]

Jeff Van Drew (NJ-02)

House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development

April 9, 2025

Good Morning Chairman Womack and Ranking Member Clyburn. Thank you for providing an opportunity to testify before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development for Fiscal Year 2026. As a Member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, I have a special appreciation for the work that you do.

William J. Hughes FAA Technical Center

The FAA Reauthorization of 2024 codified South Jersey's William J. Hughes FAA Technical Center for Advanced Aerospace in Title 49 Section 106 of the U.S. Code. This historic win for South Jersey expanded the Technical Center's role and responsibilities within the FAA. We need to make smart investments to support this expanded mission.

Last year, the Committee drafted a FY25 bill that included \$62 million for the Technical Center's Laboratories and Infrastructure sustainment. This

year, I am requesting that the committee continue this momentum by investing the same amount into Disaster Resiliency, Civil Systems and Electrical Systems with funds from the **Facilities and Equipment** Account:

- \$6 million for **Disaster Resiliency of Critical National Airspace Systems** would upgrade this “Priority One” infrastructure to enhance the Critical Power Distribution system, provide cooling for essential equipment, and ensure resilient data transmission.
- \$29 million for **William J. Hughes Technical Center Civil Systems Sustainment**. These funds will design and construct a water supply system and underground utility for all tenants at the Technical Center, including the Atlantic City Airport.
- \$27 million for **William J. Hughes Technical Center Electrical Systems Sustainment**. These funds will design and construct a replacement electrical system to supply power to the Airport Operations Area, covering all airfield lighting and navigational aids.

I also request that the Committee provide **\$10 million from the Research, Engineering and Development Account for an Emerging Technologies Accelerator**. This provides a pathway for development, demonstration, and transfer of technology that can lead to a tangible operational improvement to the aviation infrastructure.

My final request related to the Technical Center is for increased technical personnel levels. I have provided additional information to the Committee staff.

Community Project Funding

The first request is for \$3 million to construct a **Dental Hygiene School** at Atlantic Cape Community College from the EDI Account. There is a serious need for dental hygienists in my area. I spent my entire private career as a dentist and this project is personally important to me. It also has a non-federal match of over \$2 million from the Atlantic County government, who is contributing additional construction funds as well as equipment. This is my top request across all projects and is a resubmission from FY25.

The second request is for \$3.5 million dollars in economic development funds to Buena Township to fund **Emergency Shelter Water Infrastructure**. This project will design and build an expanded water and sewer connection into a local school auditorium. The school was used during Superstorm Sandy as a shelter for hundreds of people.

The third request is for \$2.5 million to design and prepare a site for an **Aviation Maintenance Training Academy** from the EDI account. This project will train generations of much-needed aviation maintenance workers. This project is supported by the United States Air Force and has matching non-federal funds from private sector partners who are interested in recruiting from this facility. This is a resubmission from FY25

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you. You know, Congressman, you recognize that the appropriations process, at least for the last several years, has been kind of a broken system. So I am asking you, as a dentist, does this process need a cap, a filling, a root canal, or an extraction?

Mr. VAN DREW. Or a combination of all the above. On a bipartisan way, I think, sometimes Congress, and this is—I am only—this is my 7th year. I have been involved in public service for a lot of years. I was 16 years in the New Jersey legislature. And as you know, clearly, and I will be very frank, you asked me a candid question, I am going to give you a candid answer. I have served as a Democrat and a Republican. I have always been a conservative, but I was in both parties. Our system is broken to a great degree. And I would say we share in the responsibility for that on both sides of the aisle. I do look forward to a time where we are more functional and more focused. We run around in circles like crazy sometimes, but all the running around doesn't necessarily always count. It is what you accomplish and what you get done for the people of this great country. So I think we need root canals, extractions, and caps. And in dentistry, that is called a full rehab, where you do the whole deal. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. I think he just told us to floss more. Mr. Clyburn?

Mr. CLYBURN. I thank the gentlemen for his testimony. I would like to say, Mr. Chairman, that I agree that there needs to be overhauls of the system. And this is going to come real strange, you are going to think strangely. But if we just stick to that document that we call the Constitution of the United States and its dictates as to how all this is to be done, we will be fine. We will be fine. But we have yield too much of Article 1's power to the executive. If we just ran in what the Constitution tells us, we will postpone that root canal. Believe me, you ought to postpone as long as you can.

Mr. VAN DREW. Respectfully ranking member, I think there are people on both sides of the aisle that would agree with you.

Mr. WOMACK. Yeah, I am not going to disagree. Ms. Bice.

Ms. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Rep. Van Drew, can you share with me, if you know, what does it cost to go to dental hygienist school?

Mr. VAN DREW. It depends whether you go to a university college or a community college. Things have been so expensive lately in our colleges and universities, which is another—again, I really don't want to digress. But it amazes me, compared to when I went to dental school, the folks coming out. If you are going to go into dentistry before you even get to your residency, there are \$300,000, \$400,000 in debt. If you even factor in inflation, which you need to do, that is still way beyond that inflationary number compared to when I went. And it is the same with hygiene school, but the good opportunity there is you can't go to community college to become a dentist or a physician, but you can be a nurse or a hygienist. So it can be very affordable, and that is the affordable way to do it. If you choose to go to university or college, you are making that choice. But it is going to be what a university or college costs today.

Ms. BICE. Well, I would concur with your assessment of the cost of college being expensive. I had individuals from the OU College of Dentistry in my office not that long ago who asked me to support

an initiative that would allow for them to not have to pay interest on the loans while they are doing a residency——

Mr. VAN DREW. We are working on that.

Ms. BICE [continuing]. A specialty. Yeah. And it was shocking to me how expensive it actually is to attend the medical school. But thank you for your testimony and for your advocacy of your constituents in your district.

Mr. VAN DREW. Thank you.

Ms. BICE. And I yield.

Mr. WOMACK. Jeff, thank you so much.

Mr. VAN DREW. Thank you so much, Steve.

Mr. WOMACK. I want to thank all the witnesses who testified this morning, all five. As I said earlier, their comments, their prepared comments, will be inserted into the record. And with that, unless there are any further questions or comments, this hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:49 a.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

To: Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations Subcommittee
Date: Monday, April 7, 2025
From: The Honorable Sylvia R. Garcia (D-TX-29)
Re: Member Testimony for THUD Appropriations Subcommittee Member Day

Thank you, Mr. Chair, Ranking Member, and Committee Members, for the opportunity to provide written testimony for the Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development Subcommittee Appropriations Member Day.

This is an important opportunity for Members of the House of Representatives to advocate for our constituents, highlight funding priorities, and help shape the appropriations process for Fiscal Year 2026.

As such, I would like to highlight programmatic and language requests that I have submitted to the Subcommittee that would significantly impact the lives of my constituents in the Texas 29th Congressional District.

These requests represent significant investments that will support our veterans, strengthen housing initiatives for vulnerable populations, and provide students with safe routes to and from school.

These investments include much-needed improvements to our infrastructure, including developing research spaces dedicated to improving community outreach programs and education opportunities. It will improve safety measures alongside the highways and streets and help revitalize multiple community centers that will enhance the local quality of life and spur community investment.

These requests will also support housing and homelessness efforts across the nation, strengthen our national transportation efforts and infrastructures, and help secure lead-free homes and water.

Specifically, as a heavy industry-focused district, I urge full support of grants and development programs, including the investment of \$30 million to create maritime training centers. A shortage of qualified maritime workers has been identified by U.S. industry leaders as the primary challenge to growth in the domestic maritime sector. The maritime industry requires technical skills training and licensing—even for entry-level positions. To earn appropriate credentials for each level of maritime industry employment, workers must complete regular training. Community and technical colleges can provide this training on an affordable basis.

In addition, I urge you to provide \$35,000,000 in funding for the U.S. Department of Transportation Maritime Administration's (MARAD) Small Shipyard Grant Program. Across the nation, small shipyards build and maintain more than 40,000 commercial workboats in the U.S. flag fleet. Small shipyards maintain the workboat fleet to ensure maritime transport remains one of the safest and most energy-efficient forms of transportation for both passengers and products. The Small Shipyard Grant Program generates incentives for small shipyards to modernize and improve their facilities as well as make capital improvements to upgrade equipment and processes that make them more efficient and competitive in the global marketplace.

Relatedly, my district continues to be impacted by the high volume of trains and railways crossing through our city and neighborhoods. To promote safety and efficiency and to prevent

even more deaths, I urge members to fund the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program to the fullest extent possible. CRISI provides critical rail safety grants that can be used for technology, infrastructure, highway rail-grade crossings, research for safety improvements, workforce development/training, preparation of emergency plans for communities where hazardous materials are transported by rail, and more. Within CRISI, I strongly urge members to prioritize funding the Rail Crossing Elimination Grant Program (RCEG), which will help separate same-grade crossings and prevent traffic and deaths.

Finally, Congress should reinvest and support the United Interagency Council on Homelessness with \$4.8 million to better coordinate the federal response to homelessness. Countless programs within the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) need increased investment after years of being chronically underfunded. The programs include:

- **\$4.25 billion for the Continuum of Care Program**, which is HUD's largest and broadest targeted program to serve individuals and families experiencing homelessness, funding evidence-based programs and approaches like permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and Housing First.
- **\$500 million for the Emergency Solutions Grants Program**. The ESG includes funds for a variety of life-saving activities in addition to newer interventions like rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention that have proven to be successful in many communities at preventing and ending homelessness.
- **Highest possible funding for tenant-based rental assistance** through the vouchers targeted to homeless families with children. These vouchers are awarded competitively based on geographic areas. Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) receive vouchers and

partner with the local Continuum of Care to identify program participants through a coordinated assessment process.

- **\$50 million for the HUD-Veterans Affairs (VA) Supported Housing Program.** The program combines Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA provides these services for participating Veterans at VA medical centers (VAMCs) and community-based outreach clinics. This level of funding will cover the cost of existing vouchers plus the creation of additional vouchers to benefit homeless veterans.
- **\$75 million for the Family Unification Program,** which provides Housing Choice Vouchers to families whose lack of housing is the primary factor in the placement of a family's child in out-of-home care and to foster youth exiting the foster system into homelessness.
- **Highest possible funding for the Section 811 Project-Based Rental Assistance Contracts,** which funds permanent supportive housing for low-income people with disabilities. This program allows persons with disabilities to live as independently as possible within their communities. We request sufficient funding to renew all expiring 811 Project-Based Rental Assistance Contracts and the provision of \$900 million for new 811 Project Rental Assistance.
- **Highest possible funding for the Section 811 Tenant-Based Rental Assistance Programs,** which provide permanent supportive housing for low-income people with disabilities. This program allows persons with disabilities to live as independently as possible within their communities. We request sufficient funding to renew all existing 811

Mainstream tenant-based vouchers, including an additional \$100 million for new 811 Mainstream vouchers, sufficient funding to renew all expiring 811 Project-Based Rental Assistance Contracts, and provision of \$900 million for new 811 Project Rental Assistance.

- **\$3 billion for the Emergency Rental Assistance Programs**, which provides short-term assistance to help stabilize households experiencing a sudden economic shock before they face eviction, instability, or homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony. I look forward to working with all the Members of the Subcommittee in advancing these priorities that are not only important to my district, but also to working families, children, and taxpayers across our great nation.

Congressman Ed Case

Hawaii's First District

Chair Womack and Ranking Member Clyburn:

I ask for your continued support for one of the most important federal programs for Native Hawaiians: the Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grant (NHHBG).

Native Hawaiians are the indigenous peoples of our country whose ancestral origins are in Hawai'i. For over a hundred years now, Native Hawaiians have been the subject of dozens of federal laws and programs and associated funding that fall under the same penumbra of other laws, programs and funding applicable to Native Americans and Alaska Natives. One of these programs arises under the Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act (NAHASDA), which, as applicable to Native Hawaiians, has its own roots in the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920.

The reasons for which the initial law of 1920 and its 1996 next generation were enacted are even more acute today. In a state where the cost-of-living ranks among the highest in the nation, the shortage of affordable housing has reached an alarming tipping point. Native Hawaiians, in particular, bear the brunt of this crisis. They experience lower homeownership rates and higher levels of overcrowded housing compared to other groups. This disparity is not merely a matter of numbers, but represents a fundamental issue of opportunity, dignity and stability for the families who are indigenous to this land.

From this legislative action emerged the NHHBG, which has served and continues to serve as a crucial lifeline, providing essential funding to facilitate the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing for Native Hawaiians through the State of Hawaii's Department of Hawaiian Homelands (DHHL). With this support, DHHL is continuing to

implement innovative solutions to tackle the housing crisis head-on. In the current generation of this effort, the department is focusing on high-density housing developments that maximize land use, ensuring more Native Hawaiian families can secure affordable homes. In addition to these housing initiatives, DHHL is actively acquiring land across multiple islands, further expanding opportunities for homeownership.

Recently, DHHL reached a historic milestone by awarding nearly 700 new leases, a significant step toward fulfilling its mission of providing land and stable housing to Native Hawaiian communities. This momentous achievement reflects the department's dedication to both immediate and long-term solutions that honor the cultural and familial ties of Native Hawaiians to their ancestral lands.

Last year, however, this Committee's draft Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development bill for Fiscal Year 2025 eliminated funding for the NHHBG altogether, even as Native American programs saw a 10% increase. Why?

Apparently, concerns were raised about a \$60 million reserve in the NHHBG. But, as was fully discussed in the full Committee debate on this proposal, this reserve is not an indicator of an excess of funds, but rather a critical financial resource that ensures the sustainability and effectiveness of high-cost housing programs. These funds have been strategically set aside to support large-scale projects, including infrastructure development and construction, that require significant upfront investment.

In fact, we are already seeing these funds being actively deployed to advance these vital projects. In the last nine months, the NHHBG has enabled DHHL to invest nearly \$13 million in critical areas such as property acquisition, homeowner assistance, financing, housing counseling and the development and construction of new properties. Thanks to this vital funding, DHHL is

also on track to allocate an impressive \$54 million by the end of 2025. Among the most significant initiatives is its planned acquisition of 82 units in Kapa'a on Kaua'i Island, marking a pivotal step toward expanding affordable housing opportunities for Native Hawaiian families.

This progress underscores the vital role of the NHHBG in addressing the housing crisis for Native Hawaiians. However, it also highlights the need to ensure that such critical support is not jeopardized.

While I fully support increased funding for Native American housing initiatives, such support must not come at the expense of Native Hawaiians. Both Native American and Native Hawaiian communities share the common goal of addressing long-standing housing needs, and it is crucial that we ensure equitable treatment for all indigenous groups.

The indigenous peoples of our nation have long stood united in their struggles for justice, rights, and resources. However, the distinctions introduced in last year's bill threaten to create a division where unity has always existed, undermining the collective strength that has defined their shared journey.

Last year, I introduced an amendment to correct this oversight and restore the funding for the NHHBG. I was grateful to have received the Committee's commitment to addressing this important issue, based on which I withdrew my amendment.

In furtherance of this effort, it is critical that we prevent the elimination of funding for the NHHBG in this year's appropriations process. The NHHBG not only upholds our long-established trust responsibility to Native Hawaiians but also serves as a profound investment in both housing and the future of Hawaii itself. It is a commitment to fostering the strength and resilience of Native Hawaiian communities, ensuring that they continue to thrive and flourish for generations to come.

I respectfully request your support for this critical program in the FY26 appropriations process so that we can continue our progress in addressing the housing challenges faced by Native Hawaiians.

Mahalo.

GILBERT RAY CISNEROS JR.
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0531

Testimony for the Record by Congressman Gilbert R. Cisneros, Jr. (CA-31)

U.S. House Committee on Appropriations

Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies

April 11, 2025

Thank you, Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies for allowing me to testify in support of critical funding for transportation and housing accounts that support communities across the nation and in California's 31st district.

President Joe Biden's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law made historic investments in our nation's transportation infrastructure – investments that are estimated to create hundreds of thousands of jobs over the next decade. These investments included funding for over 500 transportation projects; over 500 port and waterway projects; the expansion or modernization of over 11,000 public transit projects; building over 4,600 buses in the United States; and more. Unfortunately, the enacted Continuing Resolution poses a continued threat to much of the progress we have made since the enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Billions of dollars were cut from transportation safety grants and congressionally directed spending that would have made improvements to roads, railways, and more across the nation. Community Project Funding for several transportation projects in my district was cut entirely.

Modernizing our nation's infrastructure and making safety improvements are not partisan issues. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to include robust funding in this legislation for federal public transportation programs, federal highway programs, and grants focused on

climate change mitigation and resilience – as well as competitive programs established by the IIJA. These investments will create jobs and increase economic opportunities for Americans everywhere.

Further, with the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic games coming to Los Angeles County, I urge you to fund transportation needs relevant to hosting major international events as you draft the FY26 legislation. Significant investment and planning will need to take place to achieve the Olympics' goal of being a car-free event. We must ensure that Los Angeles County is well-prepared, from a transportation and infrastructure standpoint, to host the international athletes and visitors who will be attending the games and contributing to the local economy, in large part to ensure that everyone will be safe throughout these events.

In addition to transportation priorities, I would also like to highlight that we are facing a nationwide housing affordability and supply crisis. In California, 1 in 5 households spend more than half of their income on housing. Families are struggling in today's economy and spending more and more of their hard-earned money on their rent or their mortgage. It is not surprising that homelessness is on the rise. In a time when our communities needed federal support, the Continuing Resolution cut \$500 million from the federal housing budget. This has put more families at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Looking ahead, I am coming to you today to request an increase in all housing accounts, not only to FY24 levels but beyond. To emphasize a few programs, I specifically request robust funding for the Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program; the HOME Investment Partnerships Program; the Housing Choice Voucher Program; and the Emergency Housing Vouchers Program. Working with you, I know we can support our communities and families to secure fair and affordable housing. We must invest in these programs.

Further, with President Donald Trump's recent announcement that he plans to impose wide-ranging tariffs, and the uncertainty this announcement has caused, there is a serious threat that the costs to our housing supply chain and the transportation industry will increase exponentially – a cost that will only be passed on to everyday Americans.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I know you have a tough job ahead of you and I hope you will keep these priorities in mind as you craft the upcoming appropriations legislation for the benefit of our communities.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 14, 2025.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

WITNESS

HON. SEAN DUFFY, SECRETARY, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Mr. WOMACK. Good morning. The subcommittee will come to order.

Today we welcome testimony from the Honorable Sean Duffy, Secretary of the Department of Transportation, on the fiscal year 2026 budget. Thank you, Secretary Duffy, for appearing before us today. It is always good to see you. For those who don't know, Sean and I were classmates together back in 2010, and I would like to think that we would surprise ourselves in knowing we would be in these seats some 15 years later, but here we are.

The Department of Transportation is requesting \$26.7 billion in discretionary budget authority for fiscal year 2026. This request includes a \$1.2 billion increase for air traffic modernization and operations, \$596 million to ramp up our port and shipyard infrastructure, a \$400 million boost for freight rail safety, and \$770 million for multimodal freight expansion. While the skinny budget request demonstrates your commitment to making some critical investments to modernize our transportation systems, there is still much about this request that remains unknown as we await the full fiscal year 2026 budget. We do not know your total of \$1.4 billion in cuts at DOT to afford these programmatic increases at the \$26.7 billion top line level. We are also lacking detail in what the proposed \$4.1 billion reduction to the IIJA fiscal year 2026 advance appropriations. We would like to get more from you on that today.

I would be remiss not to mention that the skinny budget reveals a top line for the Department of Housing and Urban Development that will be challenging for this subcommittee, to say the least. Given the jurisdiction of the subcommittee, we cannot look at the DOT budget request in a vacuum. We will have to make some tough choices when reviewing the proposed investments of the Department of Transportation while maintaining necessary support for housing our Nation's most vulnerable.

I would also like to make sure we address a bit of an elephant in the room. The administration has undertaken efforts to seriously overhaul the Federal bureaucracy while also taking a hard look at where our taxpayer dollars are being spent. It is a valued effort that our House majority supports. I want to make something clear. Efforts to restructure the Department of Transportation without congressional approval, to not execute programs appropriated by this committee, or to not give proper congressional notification when awarding or amending grants concerns me. Article I of the

Constitution is clear. It gives Congress, through this committee, the power of the purse. I know that you, as a former Member of this body, understand this.

We want to have a partnership with you to ensure we are providing DOT with necessary resources. It is a reciprocal relationship. We provide what you need, you get us what we need. Maintaining open lines of communication between this committee and your staff is essential for us to execute our shared mission of maintaining our world-class transportation system.

Safety will remain a top priority for this subcommittee as we prepare the '26 bill. I know you share this goal as your second night on the job was the horrific DCA collision. You have taken swift action to ensure the safety of our airspace. And I know the NTSB appreciates your partnership as they continue their investigation into that accident and many others.

Additionally, our Nation's air traffic control system is showing signs of age. The telecommunications issues that have been plaguing Newark and routinely interrupting operations over the past month are unacceptable. And the fact that they were allowed to get to this point over the past several years is beyond frustrating. Mr. Secretary, I look forward to working with you to prioritize our Nation's vital infrastructure and transportation needs in Arkansas's Third District and across the country, while safeguarding hard-earned taxpayer dollars. I know our work on this subcommittee affects the safety, economic opportunity, and quality of life of every American, a duty I take seriously.

The jurisdiction of this committee is one of the most unique of the Appropriations Committee as its impacts are seen in every single congressional district around the country. As such, we have a spirit of bipartisanship here that I look forward to continuing as we begin the fiscal year 2026 process.

And it is in that spirit of bipartisanship that I would now like to recognize my dear friend and the ranking member from South Carolina, Mr. Clyburn, for any opening remarks he would like to make.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to be here today as we begin to assess the budget request for fiscal year 2026. I, too, want to welcome Secretary Duffy to his first official hearing before the subcommittee. Welcome.

Today we will examine the Department of Transportation's budget, which I expect will cover current year operations and the proposed use of funds included in the so-called skinny budget for 2026. DOT's primary mission is to invest in solutions that improve transportation safety. This includes safer transportation in our skies, on our rails, in our ports, and over and under our bridges, among other modes of transportation. It is hard to ignore the disturbing incursions and devastating crashes that have disrupted the lives and livelihoods of too many at our airports just this year, following the tragic Francis Scott Key Bridge collapse in Baltimore last year.

The bipartisan infrastructure law makes a significant 5-year investment in our Nation's transportation systems. Whether it is helping to build new runways, repair deficient bridges, or improve our ports, these historic investments are intended to enhance safety, employ American businesses, put more people to work, and cre-

ate new public-private partnerships. This law, combined with targeted investments through the annual THUD bill, was supposed to serve as a catalyst for our economy and quality of life. However, I am deeply concerned that this administration's deliberate withholding of more than \$40 billion provided by laws approved by this subcommittee and reductions to DOT's workforce halt any meaningful progress in transportation safety. Instead, we see thousands of qualified Federal workers and contractors, including air traffic controllers, made up of women, people of color, and veterans pushed out of highly skilled jobs.

While I strongly support the need for robust investments in aviation safety, we have yet to see the full potential of existing resources being used to address our most immediate threats brought forward by aging technology and staffing shortfalls at the FAA. Last week's Air Traffic Control Modernization Plan released by the administration is a great start, but it ignores the realities of cuts to FAA staff, fair competition, and overall cost, and, most importantly, how we pay for it. Americans are afraid of flying, controllers are walking off their jobs, and aviation businesses are hurting.

This plan seems to ignore the realities of the FAA losing more than 2,000 employees this year and assumes project timelines not yet defined by costs, access to materials, or feasibility. But we need to know that it is backed by action and by an administration that will deploy congressionally directed funding for America's transportation in an expeditious manner consistent with congressional intent.

Now, Mr. Secretary, I would be derelict in my duties to my constituents and children were I not to address the significant issue you raised in your submitted statement. During World War II, the DEI program that created the Tuskegee Airmen, who because of existing laws were all Black, was not a waste of money. They made the skies safer for those all-White fighter pilots they escorted, and we won that war. The DEI program that created the women of the 6888, who because of existing laws were all Black, was not a waste of money and they made the war experiences more palatable for those all-White fighting units that they efficiently and effectively supported during World War II. Both these groups were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal by this body for their service to this country.

Mr. Chairman, in 2 weeks, I will be hosting several of our colleagues during Memorial Day weekend down in Charleston, South Carolina, where that sacred holiday was first celebrated back in 1865 by the all-Black 54th and 55th Massachusetts Regiments, who were commanded by Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and Colonel Charles Fox, both of whom were White because of existing law.

Mr. Secretary, I believe this subcommittee can work in a bipartisan fashion to deliver safer transportation networks for the American people. And I look forward to hearing from you about how we can best serve America's resources and talents to build a safer and more secure country.

And I yield give back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Clyburn.

Before I recognize the chairman of the full committee, let me acknowledge the presence here in this hearing room of the parents

of First Officer of Flight 5342, Sam Lilley. Tim and Sheri, we share our deepest condolences for your loss. I want to thank you for being here. Sam's legacy lives on in your efforts here in advocating for safer skies. Please know this work is not in vain. We hear you and we will make sure to do right by you and your son in our work to invest in our aviation system. We welcome you to the proceedings here this morning.

And now the full committee chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, my good friend from the great State of Oklahoma, Mr. Cole.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I begin my formal remarks, I want to associate myself with your remarks about our guests here. And we want to thank you very much. We share your grief and your loss. Terrible situation. We appreciate you turning it to such a positive message and advocacy to try and make the skies safer. I know Tim would have been enormously proud of what you are doing right now. So thank you again for being here. It is an honor to have you in this committee room with all the rest of us.

And again, before my formal remarks, I got to tell you, Mr. Secretary, and I say that with great pleasure, it is wonderful to have you there. It is wonderful to see the energy you are approaching your job with, the commitment. I am very proud of you as a former colleague and look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead.

Thank you, Chairman Womack. And thank you, Ranking Member Clyburn. Again, I want to welcome the Secretary. It is very good to have him back, even if it is on the other side of the chamber's dais, and thank you for appearing before us today.

We are focused here today on ensuring that the FAA and our other safety agencies have the resources necessary to prevent future tragedies. It is one of the most significant duties we have, and we do not take it lightly on either side of the aisle. As we advance the fiscal year 2026 process, effective investments in our Nation's transportation systems are a priority.

Secretary Duffy's team at DOT has already made great efforts to ensure we are directing taxpayer dollars to infrastructure and safety improvements that are worthwhile, taking a fine-toothed comb to thousands of funding decisions made by the previous administration. This subcommittee will further these efforts as we look at the fiscal year 2026 bill, making sure we support programs that improve infrastructure while taking a hard look at those programs that are wasteful and duplicative. But make no mistake, the fiscal discipline will not come at the price of safety, and we will continue to ensure safety is an utmost priority in the fiscal year 2026 THUD bill.

In my opinion, there is no greater example of carrying out that mission than at the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center. In our final fiscal year 2025 appropriations, we provided funding to train an additional 2,000 air traffic controllers. I want to work with you, Mr. Secretary, to ensure that we sustain this training surge in Oklahoma City. We have the land, the facilities, and the world-class staff at the Monroney Center to ensure that controllers receive in-person, focused, state-of-the-art training. I also believe the

center provides terrific value to the taxpayer. We will continue to support the FAA's modernization efforts and oppose any attempt to decentralize or weaken controller training.

I will also reiterate my steadfast commitment to ensure that the 2026 THUD bill prioritizes investments in Tribal and rural areas. Nearly 70 percent of America's road miles are in rural areas and about 145,000 miles of roads pass through Tribal lands. These communities face notable challenges and have different needs from urban areas. As we begin the appropriations process, I am resolute in my commitment to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to fund the critical safety missions and transportation infrastructure needs of the country.

Thank you, Chairman Womack. And with that, I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Cole.

The ranking member of the full committee will probably participate at some point in time today. We do have other hearings going on. I don't think that she is wishing to give an opening statement, but we will inject her into the Q&A when she arrives.

And with that, Mr. Secretary, welcome once again to the subcommittee. We are going to accept your written testimony for the record and we will yield the floor to you. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SEAN DUFFY, SECRETARY, U.S.
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

Secretary DUFFY. Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, Chairman Cole, thank you all for inviting me to this subcommittee, as well as all the subcommittee members. I think it has been about 6 years since I have been back to the House. It is a pleasure to see you all. I am not sure if there was some plan to bring the greatest voices of the House together in Womack and Clyburn, but you guys, great voices made for media, I think.

My aim over the course of this hearing is to provide you with a sense of how building big, beautiful infrastructure is a top priority of President Trump's priorities and how we can all work together in a bipartisan effort to make that a reality. The infrastructure that connects our people, our states, moves our products is a priority of the President. Our Department, over the course of the last hundred days, has saved taxpayers roughly \$9.5 billion. Those savings include monies pulled from projects tied to social justice, to climate requirements, also boondoggle projects, as well as bringing efficiencies to the Department.

Now, many of you have asked me about grants and grant agreements and grant announcements. So just to be clear on this point, we have inherited an unprecedented backlog of 3,200 awards for grants that were announced by the last administration. However, those 3,200 were left to me to do the grant agreements on. So the announcement is fun, but the work is really the grant agreement. So there are 3,200 that have been passed off to me. Those are the ones that all of you love to call me on. And by the way, we are working through that backlog. Many of these projects of the 3,200 date back to 2022.

The last administration, they were unorganized, they were unfocused, as projects around the country were stalled by inaction and inefficiencies. No one is more frustrated with the inefficiencies

of this process than I am. Currently, there are 10 to 14 different systems to track the status of grants across the Department of Transportation. There is not one system. There are 10 to 14 systems that are used to track grants. I am committed to consolidating all of this information into one dashboard so grantees can see how money is being spent—all of you can see the progress of grants. I want to bring you that transparency, but that is also consolidating the system in which the DOT uses to provide that information to all of you and to the American people. I promise to ensure that transparency as we move through this process.

The Department of Transportation is one of the few nondefense Federal agencies to receive an increase in funding under President Trump's fiscal year 2026 budget. The reason is simple. The President, he is a builder. He loves to build and he wants to build at DOT. Our budget carefully focuses taxpayer resources on items critical to our most fundamental mission of safety and investing in transportation infrastructure.

We have pushed forward with the approval of 405 grants totaling \$4.9 billion in the President's hundred-plus days in office. The President's budget of \$26.7 billion in new discretionary funding for 2026 is a \$1.5 billion increase over 2025, or it is 5.8 percent as an increase, which I am proud to see that we have. We do not want to take additional funds from hardworking taxpayers for granted in this era of government where it has become too big, too inefficient, and too wasteful. We have carefully planned for these dollars to fund urgent projects that, once built, will serve future generations for decades and I think build and make this country stronger.

And so I am sure you are going to ask me questions. As Mr. Clyburn indicated, what is going on with staffing cuts? We are going to try to make the Department of Transportation more efficient, do more with less. I am happy to talk about that.

Also I want to discuss Newark. We are working through the telecom infrastructure upgrade to take care of the delays. As we speak right now, the FAA has brought in together all of the airlines who serve Newark to have a conversation about how there can be a delayed reduction. So if you book your flight, that flight is going to fly, you don't have people at the airport for, you know, 2, 4, 6 hours, then a flight canceled. So we are working through that now. Hopefully, in the next week or two, we will have additional, really good news about the telecom progress that we have made. And happy to talk about the air traffic control system that we announced last week.

And finally, I know my time is over, but I do want to say thank you to Tim and Sheri for coming. I have appreciated their support. I have gotten to know them since January 29th and the loss of their son Sam. And they have been a force for good. And I am grateful for their partnership. I am grateful they have been—their coming here today. And I think this is a moment where we are trying to pay, what happened in late January, we are trying to pay it forward to make sure we don't have another set of families of 67 people that have to fight to make sure they have a system that is going to work. So thank you for being here.

And to the committee, thank you for having me. And I am happy to take the committee's questions.

[The information follows:]

Budget Hearing – U.S. Department of Transportation
Testimony of Secretary of Transportation
Sean P. Duffy
Before the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development
May 14, 2025

Chairman Womack, Ranking Member Clyburn, and Members of the Subcommittee – thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. My aim over the course of this hearing is to provide you a sense of how building big, beautiful infrastructure is at the top of the President’s priorities, and how we can work together on this bipartisan effort.

Our Department has already saved taxpayers more than \$9.5 billion in the President’s first 100 days. Those savings include money pulled from projects tied up by wasteful DEI and climate requirements. We inherited an unprecedented backlog of over 3,200 awarded projects without signed grant agreements. Many of these projects dated back to 2022. The last administration was unorganized and unfocused as projects around the country were stalled by inaction, and inefficiency. No one is more frustrated with the inefficiencies of this process than I am. Currently there are 10-14 different systems to track the status of grants across the Department. Under my leadership, I am committed to consolidating all of this information into one dashboard so grantees can see how our money is spent. I promise to ensure radical transparency to you all as well as the American people.

The Department of Transportation is one of the few non-Defense federal agencies to receive an increase in funding under the President’s Budget for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026. The reason is simple: the president wants to build. Our budget carefully focuses taxpayer resources on items critical to our most fundamental mission of safety and investing in transportation infrastructure. We have pushed forward with the approval of 405 grants totaling \$4.9 billion in the President’s first 100 days. In total, the President’s Budget requests \$26.7 billion in new discretionary funding for FY 2026, or \$1.5 billion more than FY 2025 enacted, about a 5.8 percent increase.

We do not take additional funds from hard-working taxpayers for granted in an era where government has become too big, too inefficient, and too wasteful. We have carefully planned for these dollars to fund urgent projects that once built, will serve future generations for decades.

Our budget requests \$18 billion in discretionary appropriations for the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), \$1 billion more than FY 2025 enacted. Recent tragedies such as the mid-air collision above DCA have demonstrated the need to refocus our agency on the core mission of safety. That’s why we are increasing funding for the FAA. Specifically, the budget supports hiring and training 2,500 new air traffic controllers, revamping key air traffic facilities, and replacing antiquated radar systems with the latest technology.

The President has also expressed the revitalization of American shipbuilding as a central pillar of his Administration’s plan to make America great again. Our budget provides the Maritime Administration (MARAD) \$596 million more than FY 2025 enacted. These funds will enable MARAD to carry out the President’s historic executive order for the creation of a golden age in

shipbuilding. The request includes \$550 million to reinforce port infrastructure and \$105 million to resurrect neglected shipyards. The budget also boosts the President's infrastructure focus by providing an additional \$770 million for INFRA—the Nationally Significant Multimodal Freight & Highways Projects program. Finally, our budget makes a five-fold investment in rail safety and infrastructure by providing \$500 million in additional Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program (CRISI) funds.

There's so much more we can do together, and I look forward to working with Congress on unlocking what's possible through these historic investments to American infrastructure.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. We are going to begin the Q&A portion. Members will have 5 minutes. And it won't surprise anybody in this room to know that I am kind of lenient on that, as long as you don't use 4½ of your minutes to lecture or editorialize and only leave 30 seconds for an answer to a question. But we are going to be very tolerant of the people here because, at the end of the day, we all share the same goal, and that is to ensure that we are doing the very best we can by the people who utilize the transportation modes in this great country.

You will be recognized in the order of seniority based on who was seated at the beginning of the hearing, as is typical, going back and forth between parties.

One other note. At around 10:30, because there is another subcommittee hearing going on today, our colleague, David Joyce, is chairing the Financial Services and General Government Subcommittee. He will come in and I will seek a unanimous consent request to allow him to get to his 5 minutes of questions so that he can return back to his subcommittee.

So at this time, I am going to recognize myself.

Secretary Duffy, one of the President's first actions was to undo burdensome regulations relating to climate and equity brought by the prior administration. You followed suit. You have discussed this in your opening statement today, revoking Biden era policies and requirements pertaining to social and environmental justice. You also talked or tasked the modal administrations to review grant applications and awards to ensure funds are implemented in accordance with statute and not extraneous Biden era policies unrelated to transportation.

You mentioned 3,200 grant awards. So far, according to our records, you have cleared just over 480 of those, about 15 percent. Can you give us a status update and help us understand the steps you are taking to review and how the grantee is notified as we move through this process?

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah, I appreciate the question, Mr. Chairman. We are all hands on deck right now working through these grant agreements. And again, I think you are going to see progress ramp up. But if we look over the past 4 years, there is a few months where the last administration was able to get more grant agreements out the door than we have. But by and large, we are moving at a near record pace and we are going to continue to move at that pace. I know how important these projects are to all of your states and your districts, and especially as we come into the spring building season or we are in the spring building season, how important it is to get those agreements signed.

Mr. WOMACK. What are your limitations?

Secretary DUFFY. Well, just it takes time, right? It takes time to go through and think through these grant agreements. I will say there is a level of bureaucracy, not just at DOT, but I think throughout government. We need to streamline that bureaucracy. Again, we have to do it right, but we are looking for efficiencies. How can we do it faster? We are looking at using AI tools as well as other technological tools that we could deploy that could help us move faster on these grant agreements. We are in that exploration phase right now.

Mr. WOMACK. I want to talk a bit about staffing for a moment. Longstanding language in our bill requires notification prior to any program elimination or major reorganization. Over the past few months, we have seen a series of efforts by the administration to reduce the size of the Federal workforce. And I think a lot of us up here would agree that the Federal bureaucracy has become bloated, but I think we need to be a little bit more precise in downsizing a department with a mission as critical as DOT's.

The dismissal of probationary employees has brought a reduction to the workforce of 3,000. When you add two rounds of buyouts, DOT will see a 12 percent reduction in staffing since January 20th. I also understand that OMB requested a reduction in force plan to be submitted by mid-March.

So the question is pretty simple. How many departures can you handle without eroding the ability to carry out a safe and effective mission?

Secretary DUFFY. So, first off, you mentioned the reprogramming. And I know there are requirements to report to Congress if there is going to be reprogramming. We are working through some ideas right now on how we can streamline the Department. When we have completed those ideas, we will no doubt share them with you for your consideration.

Listen, we can do more with less, Mr. Chairman. And if we do more with less, that means that we will have additional money, I think, through this committee to put back into the infrastructure that so many of us dearly want in our communities. And so the DRP is maybe not the—it is not a scalpel. People are willing to take an opportunity to retire, to resign. We should take them up on that.

And if we have shortfalls, I am mission-driven. The President loves this Department, loves the work that we do. You all care about the work that we do. If I have to hire people back in, I will do that to make sure we can do the work. But if I have people who don't want to be there, that want to take the offer, well, let's get some people in who are hungry to do the work. That is what I am looking for. And so we are going to make it work. It is not a scalpel, but it is an opportunity for us to reduce the force, get the work done, and save the American people money.

Mr. WOMACK. I thank the gentleman.

Mr. Clyburn.

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I notice, Mr. Secretary, I made reference in my opening statement to your submitted statement where the term "DEI" was used. In your oral statement, you used the term "social justice," which is fine with me. I would call your attention to the fact, however, that that also raises an issue with me.

We know what social justice has meant in this country. I am a native of South Carolina, my parents, grandparents, all South Carolinians, where the Civil War began, where enslavement in this country really became the number one economy, that made South Carolina the biggest economy in the country, all because of enslavement. Now, we have done some things in this country to overcome all of that. And one of the things we have done is to make special investments.

My late wife, to whom I was married for 58 years, had to walk two and a half miles to school every morning, right past the White school where the White kids had buses. That was social injustice. And this country has made a big investment to get beyond that. And now all of a sudden, we see this as wasteful government spending. I don't think so. I think this is wise investment in a country that has challenges that we need all people involved in.

And in the Department of Transportation, where I spent a lot of my time here in the Congress, we have had some rules and regulations about how to build highways, where to build highways, where to put those bridges. And we have done some things to stop that injustice. That is not wasteful spending.

And so I would like to know exactly when you make these decisions, what kind of decision-making goes into the fact that if I raise the issue that this bridge or this highway is busting up a neighborhood, putting the children on one side of the highway and the schools on the other side of the highway, I am not telling you what I think, I am telling you what happened in my neighborhood. These are social injustices that I think we as a government has got a responsibility to make sure that does not happen going forward.

So I love builders. I am a bridge builder myself. I am not trying to get from one side of the lake to the other, but a bridge builder to the future for my children and grandchildren. And I think social justice is an area that we need to pay attention to. And I would like to know, how do you make decisions about that?

Secretary DUFFY. So, Mr. Clyburn, Congressman, I am well aware of your history and I think America should be proud of your history and all that you have done. I am talking about something very specific in regard to DOT. Okay? I am not talking about the broader political conversation.

So there are requirements in the last administration, like a racial equity impact analysis has been completed for the project, or the recipient or a project partner has adopted an equity and inclusion program plan or has otherwise instituted equity-focused policies related to project procurement, material sourcing, construction, inspection, hiring or other activities. And so what I see with the climate and the social justice requirements in the projects that you so dearly want built, that it is adding costs on, it is costing more money. And if we take out, you know, 5 to 10 percent on climate or social justice, that is money we don't have for additional projects. And that is my concern.

And then the final point is the Supreme Court in the Harvard decision said, we are not going to divide people and make decisions based on race or sex. We are going to make it based on the people, and Harvard, the quality of their applications to the school. And so here, these were specific instances where the costs were going up. And I don't know that this was adding to the safety or the quality of the project.

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, I would ask you to have your staff look at the Adarand decision that deals with this issue. And the Adarand decision has not been overturned by the courts. And I maintain that a lot of what we are doing at the Department of the Administration today is in violation of the Adarand decision.

I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. The chair seeks unanimous consent to recognize Mr. Joyce out of order since he has some other duties he needs to fulfill.

Hearing no objection, Mr. Joyce, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. JOYCE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Secretary Duffy.

Secretary DUFFY. Mr. Joyce.

Mr. JOYCE. Mr. Secretary, in fiscal year 2019, the Department of Transportation launched a Port Infrastructure Development Program to increase port capacity and resiliency while modernizing an aging port infrastructure. Since then, the Department has distributed more than \$2 billion to port authorities, Tribal, state, and local governments, and private companies. While 70 percent of these funds went to the West Coast and East Coast ports last year, only 2 percent of these funds were awarded to the Great Lakes ports. I am concerned that under the previous administration, these funds were not being distributed fairly across all regions.

In your testimony you mentioned your budget request provides the Maritime Administration with \$596 million more and fiscal year 2025 enacted less. How will your request help ensure ports in all regions of the country have access to needed funding so that they are able to operate at full capacity?

Secretary DUFFY. So I thought you might ask me that question. So I asked MARAD, is there a disparity in the money that goes to the Great Lakes? And they are telling me no, but I am going to investigate that a little bit further. As you know, I am from northern Wisconsin and we care about Lake Michigan and Lake Superior and equal access to resources is important. It is a driving force in the economy in our region. So I understand that. I will continue to have this discussion with MARAD and I would look forward to getting back to you and getting you the information that I find.

Mr. JOYCE. Thank you. I have been open about going for all the Great Lakes. I haven't just pushed Lake Erie. But can you describe any plans your Department has to ensure and improve that regional distribution of Federal assistance under the port infrastructure grant, or is that something that you need to take a look?

Secretary DUFFY. Well, we are working through our plans right now and would be happy to partner with you as we review that and look at it.

Mr. JOYCE. Many aviation stakeholders are still concerned about the challenges the FAA faces in reviewing medical certificate applications as well as the steps it is proposing to streamline that process. According to stakeholders, two of the main issues causing delays in the FAA medical certification process are, first, the outdated paper-based system used to submit and process medical records; and second, the limited availability of specialist review panels, which only meet every couple of months and can only review a small number of cases at a time. These challenges create long wait times before a physician can even begin reviewing a case, leaving both the pilots and the aviation medical examiner stuck in a stressful and often frustrating holding pattern.

Would you, Secretary, would you describe any actions your Department has taken or plans to take to streamline this process, re-

duce cost to taxpayers, and ensure pilots can safely return to the air in a timely manner.

Secretary DUFFY. So this is an issue that I, too, have heard a lot about. A lot of pilots have reached out. It is too slow, it is too laborious, complicated. And so I have had conversations with the FAA on how we can improve this process and I would be happy to, again, circle back with you and talk about how we are going to navigate making this process more responsive and quicker.

Mr. JOYCE. And I understand and fully appreciate the fact that you have inherited a lot of problems in a small period of time and I know, seeing you work, that you will be able to work through this process.

I will throw out one last thing is I had an opportunity under former Chairman Shuster and Secretary Chao to go to Canada to see the system that they have in place up there for the aviation control. And I know that there are some issues with it, but there are better systems that exist than what we have in place, and have been in the towers to watch the people have to transfer paper. I can't believe that in this day and age this is an American system. But I know under your leadership we will get that problem fixed.

Thank you, sir. I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Joyce.

I am going to recognize now the full committee chairman, Mr. Cole, and Ms. Torres will be on deck. Mr. Cole.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

First to my friend from Arkansas and certainly the Secretary, I had the privilege many years ago or a number of years ago of actually chairing this subcommittee and I had a pretty simple philosophy on anything that was safety related that an administration proposed, and it was that we would match or exceed anything that related directly to safety. I didn't want that issue to ever become a partisan if you had funded or not funded that kind of discussion.

And again, we will wait and see what we have to work with, but we certainly hope we can work with you on that. I don't think there is any partisan division about making sure the railroads are safe, the airways are safe, the roads are safe. And you are probably in a better position to tell us what you need to do that than we are to tell you what needs to happen. So we will try to make that same commitment to you.

Our air traffic control system, as you know, is facing a lot of strain, particularly at our busiest towers. And I want to thank you for your visit to the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center in February, and your decision to announce the hiring surge immediately afterward was a clear signal of your leadership and commitment to addressing the shortage of controllers that we have seen grow over many years. The fiscal year 2026 skinny budget reflects the Department's commitment to accelerate air traffic controller hiring, requesting increases in FAA operations for a hiring surge at the Air Traffic Control Academy. So we appreciate that and we are going to try and work and meet your request there.

As you know, the FAA Academy itself is actually a world-class facility. It has trained generations of controllers to the highest standards. And in my view, the complexity and precision required for this, a safety critical workforce, demands a centralized, hands-

on training environment and not a patchwork of remote or decentralized approaches. So again, we appreciate your efforts.

I was very pleased last week, just to update you, to have the opportunity to deal with the acting administrator, and I hope I don't butcher his name, but Rocheleau, about bringing additional teaching resources to the Academy.

Can you update us on the progress FAA has made toward addressing the air traffic controller shortfall? And how many candidates did we actually hire last year?

Secretary DUFFY. I appreciate the question and I appreciate the engagement from the Oklahoma delegation. You guys have been wonderful to work with and have given the support to the Academy that is necessary.

So what you think would be a very simple set of solutions to get more butts in seats at the Academy is far more complicated than that. And we have been working through streamlining, testing, getting the best test scores through the process and in the Academy. What we have done is we have air traffic controllers who are teaching the classes in the Academy, but not all of the classes are specifically air traffic control specific. So we are going to bring in professors to teach the nonspecific air traffic control classes. That will free up air traffic controllers to teach additional classes, which means we get more instructors in the Academy, which means we can get more kids, young people, through the Academy.

So there was a target of 2,000 for this fiscal year of controllers to get out of the Academy—or to get into the Academy. That was not going to be met. But after this supercharged announcement that we made, I think we are going to hit the 2,000.

One of the problems that we have, as you know, Congressman, is there is a 35 percent washout rate at the Academy. When I was there, some of the young people said, if you could just give us some help, if there are some tutors that could assist us with just a little extra help we may need, a lot of these washout students in the Academy are actually going to make it. They are going to be good controllers, but just give us some extra support. So we have now stood that up as well. If we could get the washout rate from 35 percent to 25 percent, we are starting to talk, you know, real numbers, another couple hundred a year. So my hope is we are going to get above 1,200 this year with next year, hopefully, getting 2,200, 2,300 into the Academy.

And then we have offered a bonus to controllers who are actually experienced. They can retire after 25 years. And so to get them to stay on with that experience, we have offered to pay them a 20 percent upfront bonus to their salaries if they will stay. And for every year they will stay, we are going to give them 20 percent of their bonus up front. Again, you got to pay people to stick around. And we are in an emergency situation and I think we are going to see a lot of controllers take us up on that.

I would say I know a lot of them are looking at their retirements that the Congress is talking about right now. That could force some of them out rather than stay because they are looking at long-term funding. I know that that has come up with the controllers, but that is the work of the Congress. But just full transparency on what they are considering, Congressman.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, we are going to have time for a second round. There are some other issues. But I want to commend you on the efforts you have already taken. I think it is exactly the right approach. We have done this in the military before to make sure we didn't lose recruits. We helped them get to where they wanted to go and I think you are absolutely on the right track on that.

And I appreciate you raising retirement issues. Some of us are having very direct talks with our own leadership about that. And we could lose some very valuable people. You are talking about the ones here. I can give you a whole list of valuable technicians at Tinker Air Force Base and places like that that you can't change the rules in the middle of the game. You have made some commitments. You need to follow through on those commitments, and we will see where we end up at the end of this process. But again, thank you for your service.

Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Mrs. Torres.

Secretary DUFFY. I wouldn't object if there is not a second round. I will be okay with that if you guys don't want it.

Mr. WOMACK. Mrs. Torres.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you, Chairman. And Secretary Duffy, welcome to the committee and I look forward to welcoming you in the Inland Empire sometime in the fall.

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you.

Mrs. TORRES. I want to give you a little background on the district that I represent, California's 35th Congressional District. We refer to it as the Inland Empire. Infrastructure is our lifeline. Our region is a logistics hub where trucks, trains, and airplanes deliver goods to massive warehouses. The bipartisan infrastructure law and this committee's appropriations gave my constituents hope, investing in public transit, safety, and a more reliable transportation network.

But I am very concerned that the ability of my cities to build these projects is being undermined by the layoffs, the workforce layoffs. The cuts have made it almost impossible to get funds out the door and only 12 percent of Federal grants are disputed being distributed. Delays combined with lumber and steel tariffs have threatened vital programs and it has resulted in one major rail public transportation program to be completely canceled, no longer affordable.

I also represent the Ontario airport and I am concerned about the recent actions taken that undermine our air travel safety. Bipartisan efforts in Congress, as you have recognized, increased funding for air traffic controllers. But the administration undermined that by offering deferred resignations to controllers. And at least 400 of them responsible for maintaining air traffic control systems were fired, resulting in delays to much needed upgrades. I agree and I am so happy to hear what you have just told the chairman of the full committee and I want to make sure that you are successful in hiring those 2,000 people, in addressing the attrition rates, and addressing the training needs of this workforce.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent to enter into the record an email that I received from United Airlines this week about air traffic safety. This is an email that was sent to me as a

passenger on a future flight that will be flying through Newark Airport.

Mr. WOMACK. Without objection, so ordered.

Mrs. TORRES. Secretary Duffy, planes are falling from the sky, some crashing into each other. Air traffic controller systems are unexpectedly shutting down and resetting themselves. Traffic controllers are too nervous to continue in many cases. Praying for a safe landing isn't enough. I am glad that you recognize that. The flying public, though, needs to hear more reassurances that you and the Department and all of us working together are doing everything in our power to ensure that no more lives will be put at risk and that we can continue to fly safely and be delivered to our destination in a safe manner.

I also want to address the planned closure of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration regional office in Ontario. It is a big mouth name for an office that does such critical work. This office plays a critical role in overseeing the safe movement of hazardous materials, like dangerous gases and corrosive materials, directly impacting the safety of my constituents and the entire region. The Alameda corridor splits my district in two. Hazardous materials travel through the heart of my cities every single day. And this office is supposed to stop problems before they happen.

I sent a letter to raise concerns about this closure and, frankly, the May 8 response I received reads like it was written by someone who doesn't give a s---t about the consequences of closing this office. It provided zero assurance that this office would be restored and blamed the least termination on another agency within this administration. We can't be blaming each other. We have to take accountability for what has happened and we have to reverse course.

It is clear that the safety of my constituents and the region at large is being completely ignored by bureaucrats looking to justify savings on a website. Just last year, inspectors from our region identified 15 probable violations. And it only takes one safety violation to result in a catastrophic incident, like the one in East Palestine, Ohio.

Secretary Duffy, how can DOT justify this closure? And I know that my time is almost running out, but how can we justify this closure and can I count on you to review the process of this other agency of closing this office?

Mr. WOMACK. I will give him a few seconds to respond.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you.

Secretary DUFFY. Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of falsehoods that were just lodged. If you would give me a moment to respond to the 5 minutes of misinformation, I would be happy to do that.

So we have not fired, haven't let any one air traffic controller go.

Mrs. TORRES. I didn't say they fired them.

Secretary DUFFY. You said that we let 400 go. No one in air traffic control has been allowed to take a deferred resignation offer. We have preserved all of our safety critical mission positions, including air traffic controllers. Not one has been allowed to retire by any of the programs that we have offered. Not one, not 400. Zero.

We are in this situation because the last administration didn't see to take initiative on the 3,000 controllers short that we were. Under COVID they didn't stand up the school fast enough to get more kids through Oklahoma, so we would have more controllers in the airspace today. The infrastructure didn't rot in the last 100 days. We didn't have 3,000-controller shortages in the last hundred days. There was 4 years that came before where nothing was done. And watchdog groups have warned the DOT that the infrastructure was failing and nothing was done. So we are going to do something about it. We are going to try to fix it.

By the way, if I could just talk about grants, if I could. Mr. Chairman, can I have just one grace moment to be 30 seconds. So between Obama and—

Mrs. TORRES. Two thousand positions were funded in the last administration, sir—

Mr. WOMACK. Let the gentleman respond.

Secretary DUFFY. Between—

Mrs. TORRES [continuing]. So don't say nothing was done.

Secretary DUFFY. Between Obama and Trump, Election Day and Inauguration Day, in that timeframe, Obama announced 50 grants in that timeframe. Between Trump and Biden, the Trump administration announced between Election Day and Inauguration Day 100 grants. This time between Biden and Trump, Pete Buttigieg announced 1,000 grants, a massive increase. And you all say, where are my grant agreements?

So they announce all these grants and I have to do the work. And I am going to do the work. But offer some grace to the DOT. There are 3,200 backlogs here. We are going to work through it. I want to get you your money, but to blame it on us, I think, is rich.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

And once again to my colleagues, as I said in announcing the Q&A, if you are going to spend most of your time editorializing, giving your opinion, that is okay, it is your time. But don't ask the committee to be terribly lenient if you are going to do that, and then expect a response from the Secretary.

Mr. Rogers.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Secretary, welcome home.

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you.

Mr. ROGERS. You have got a distinguished record of service in this body, and so one of us has done good and it is you. Thank you for serving in this capacity. We predict that your record will be enhanced even more in this job than in your previous one.

Let me ask you about rural highways, roadways. Twenty percent of Americans live in rural areas, but they account for 43 percent of all deaths from '17 to '21, over 83,000 fatalities. Investments in rural highways are critical to improve safety, accessibility, and economic growth.

What are your plans, especially for the rural road system in the country?

Secretary DUFFY. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the question. We have 40,000-plus deaths a year on our roads. It is way too many. And I think in rural America, where I am from, sometimes those

roads get really long and people cannot pay attention. That could be a problem. There is some who may become tired on those trips. But I do think some of the technology that comes on board right now that can warn people when they are tired, I do think autonomous technology is going to enhance the safety of everyone on our roads. And we haven't really seen substantial movements in the numbers of death over the course of the last decade. And I think this technology truly will save lives and prohibit families from going through the pain of losing a loved one.

But again, this is a problem that the Department has grappled with and I do think the answer is going to come through technology.

Mr. ROGERS. And the same language applies to airports, rural airports. What do you see for their future given the fact that that the proposal is to zero out the EAS system for rural America?

Secretary DUFFY. So, first off, I had EAS airports in my district, understand the importance of Essential Air Service for rural America. I don't know how many on the committee have a EAS airport, but I know a lot of people in this body and in the body across the Capitol do as well. So we are going to work through a plan to try to make this efficient and provide the service to communities that depend on it. And I will partner with this committee, bipartisan, as we work through that and navigate service, but doing it more cost effectively. I hope I am able to make that happen, and I will partner with you in that process.

Mr. ROGERS. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, thank you. Yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Quigley.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Thank you. Mr. Secretary, I appreciate what the chairman is saying, and I think he will tell you that we, he and I, have a very solid history of bipartisan, pragmatic ways of trying to get things done. So I want you to know this is pragmatic.

If it rolls, floats, or flies, it comes through Chicago. This is too important. O'Hare, you know, Lake Michigan, one in four freight trains goes through Chicago. So the criteria we talk about with these grants, population, existing infrastructure aging, quality, economic activity, traffic volume, that is all I want to talk about.

Secretary DUFFY. Great.

Mr. QUIGLEY. So you can appreciate a little concern I would have just from a pragmatic point of view, putting aside personal feelings, quote, "give preference to communities with marriage and birth rates higher than the national average." I am just not sure what the heck that has to do with the pragmatic issues we are trying to solve very quickly.

Numerous studies, Urban Institute analysis, census tracts with higher marriage and birth rates have more households with access to a car. They also feature a much higher share of residents whose commutes occur while driving alone, who—also a lower share of people who walk, bike, or take transit. We are actually, if you follow that, going to add to congestion issues and traffic volume and, therefore, pollution. It is sort of contra to the pragmatic aspects that we are trying to get done here.

Secretary DUFFY. So a lot of transportation activity in Chicago, I think you now have a Pope from Chicago, too, that you guys don't stop.

Mr. QUIGLEY. But he is a Sox fan, so I digress.

Secretary DUFFY. I hope he is not a Bears fan. That is all I can say. I mean, but I do think this is one factor to look at. And the reason I am looking at—

Mr. QUIGLEY. I mean, Mr. Scalise is 50th, Louisiana, I suspect he might be concerned about this, too. So it is bipartisan.

Secretary DUFFY. By the way, I think infrastructure is bipartisan. This is probably one of the most bipartisan jobs you could get in in the government because—

Mr. QUIGLEY. Tell me why marriage matters.

Secretary DUFFY. Because I think if you look at marriage and birth rates, that is going to lead to future needs. Where you have families developing and where you have kids being born is where you are going to have population. And then when you have population, that is going to mean you are going to need infrastructure needs. But it is not the end all, be all. I am not making decisions at the DOT based only on marriage and birth rates. I said that is a factor that we should consider for future growth.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Back to the studies that show it does just the opposite, that those census tracts tend to be wealthier, frankly, more white and in less need of public transportation. So you are actually working against the need. They are more likely to drive in a car by themselves.

Secretary DUFFY. Who is? I'm sorry, will you explain that to me?

Mr. QUIGLEY. I will give you the studies and the footnotes, but we will start with the Urban Institute analysis.

Secretary DUFFY. But the more kids you have in an area, the less transportation needs you will have? Is that the study?

Mr. QUIGLEY. No. The census tracts that have the numbers that you are talking about are wealthier. They are more likely to drive where they are going with a single person in the car. A whole bunch of factors that add to greater congestion. They are wealthier. So there are communities that need public transportation less. These are all statistical. I am just saying, putting aside the personalities, it is a factor that moves us in the opposite direction.

Secretary DUFFY. I will look at the study and I would love to talk to you about it, but from just what I have seen with the data, it is not White families that are having more kids. It is other families that look like mine that are having a lot of kids.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Population and population trends is a criteria that makes sense. It is what we already use. But you are talking about something that works in the opposite direction and it doesn't help the situation.

Secretary DUFFY. Well, again, where we have children, we have families, we have population growth, and we will need infrastructure. I think that is pretty simple. If you can—

Mr. QUIGLEY. The notion is that you want to help families with kids. I mean, generally, you want to help families. You want to help families with kids.

Secretary DUFFY. Well, I think families are great, and I think kids are great, but I also think that—

Mr. QUIGLEY. You want to support families with children.

Secretary DUFFY. Well, no, I want to support infrastructure needs of the future. And where we have families and kids is where

we are going to need infrastructure, where I think we are going to see growth. I think that is fair to say.

Mr. QUIGLEY. But what you are going to have with more kids and you are going to have poorer census tracts, they are going to need more public transportation. This is going to skew us toward highway projects, road projects, and fewer projects for mass transit. That is just statistically true.

Secretary DUFFY. If we need more freight to bring in more goods, more diapers into these communities, we can talk about that. If you think we need public—

Mr. QUIGLEY. At the second round I am sure we will.

Secretary DUFFY [continuing]. Transportation in these areas where we are having more kids, we should talk about that as well. This was not one-off highways. We will look at the whole Department and all the modes and how we can serve the future of population growth.

Mr. QUIGLEY. I just wish you would appreciate this is the pragmatic, personal feelings aside, we will do that in the second round.

Secretary DUFFY. I appreciate that.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Thank you.

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you.

Mr. WOMACK. We will take up the diaper dandies in round two. Okay, Mr. Quigley?

Mrs. Bice.

Mrs. BICE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being with us. And I want to take a moment to reiterate Chairman Womack and Chairman Cole's condolences to the Lilley family. Thank you for being here and working with us to ensure that we continue to have the safest skies in the world.

I, as Chairman Cole, also represent portions of the Oklahoma City area and I am proud to represent thousands of FAA employees in my district who work at the Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center. I want to thank you for your recent visit in February and I am glad you are able to see the critical facility and the great work that is being done there.

I want to share with you a quick story because I think it is an example of how broken things have been. After I was elected, I tried to get into see FAA Mike Monroney Aeronautical Center for quite some time and the former Secretary of Transportation made it very difficult for the staff to allow me in. I finally got in, in October of '22, and keep in mind the White House was open in August of '22 for visits again, but it was when I arrived to the facility I was required to answer COVID protocol questions. Secretary Buttigieg still had these protocols for certain facilities in place and it was pretty shocking to have to answer those questions. So it is refreshing to have someone come in and focus on the mission and actually what needs to be done to improve the safety of our skies.

The FAA workforce in Oklahoma is crucial and the Academy is a national asset that prepares our air traffic controllers for the rigors of a very difficult job. Mr. Secretary, as you know, the Academy relies on timely medical and security screenings as well as capacity in field training facilities to move candidates through that pipeline in a timely fashion. I have a particular concern with the lengthy delays of the medical screening process and the field training, but

I was excited on your recent actions to address the factors as part of the supercharge initiative and I would like you to talk a little bit more about that and how we can move these folks through the pipeline faster.

Secretary DUFFY. I appreciate the question. Yeah. So, by the way, if you all haven't been to the Academy, it is amazing. You should all go. It is really remarkable how we train up air traffic controllers, but yet we were having this issue where it was taking up to a year and a half once you apply to become a controller, to actually get a spot in the Academy. And the issue with that is if you are 25 years old and you are waiting a year and a half, you are going to go find a different job. You can't wait for a potential seat at the Academy.

And so one of the holdups was the medicals, medical exams. And so we have worked with our doctors, which it seems like it would be easier than it actually was. We have incentivized them with additional pay to take our applicants earlier, so we get our appointments scheduled faster. And then it was taking, you know, months to get the reports back. And so we are going to give them a bonus to get those reports back to us in 2 weeks. And sometimes this comes down to money.

By the way, we have that in the current—we are moving dollars around at the FAA that you have given us the grace to do, but we are moving dollars around to pay for it with the existing money that the FAA has. But again, that is allowing us to get these students who take the test, get the medical, do the background check, and we are taking those top scorers and putting them into the academy first. So it is moving faster, which is—

Mrs. BICE. Merit-based, which is incredibly important because that hasn't been the case in the past, correct?

Secretary DUFFY. Yes. Right. So if you get a 90, 98 on your test, we are going to put you in before someone who got an 82. Like I just think that makes sense. And the opportunity to not have that student wash out is way better. So I think—because the washout rate becomes a real issue and the best qualified students will give us a lower washout rate. But so thank you for recognizing the hard work it took to try to figure this out.

Mrs. BICE. Well, I appreciate the focus on that. And I do want to touch on technology, but I also want to make one quick note. You mentioned in your testimony grants and the number of grant programs that—and processes that you are having to deal with. And that is a focus for me because it is obvious to me if it is happening at your agency, it is happening across government. And so many grants are being duplicated in many ways to the same entities, so I want to work with you to streamline that in any way that we can.

Last, I just want to quickly ask you to touch on the technology upgrades. You had a great visual when you did your press conference showing floppy disks. I am of the age that I know what a floppy disk is, but my 24-year-old does not. What are we going to do to invest in technology to get our air traffic infrastructure up to really snuff, up to the 21st century quickly?

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah, I appreciate the question. We have a whole problem and if you look at the infrastructure around air traf-

fic control, I don't think there is anything there to save. If there is some scraps you could offer a junkyard, that is possible. But really this is, you know, '80s, our radar is from the '70s. We have a couple new ones from early '80s. I mean, that is how old the stuff is.

But if I am really honest with you, I don't think it is been done because it is really hard. We are going to update the telecom moving from copper to fiber. By the way, that is really fast. We actually have to slow down the fast speed of fiber to then make the equipment that we use in the facilities, make it think it is as slow as copper. Otherwise—because it can't take the high speed, it is so old. And so as we think about how we are going to do that with fiber, slowing it down, and then, at the same time, building the infrastructure inside the TRACONs or the towers or the centers, and also keep planes in the air and doing it safely, it is not going to be an easy task.

We are going to—Newark has to be addressed and has to be addressed first. My preference would be that we start at lower volume airports and we go through that process and learn as we go how we choreograph the build. But, again, if we can put a man on the moon, we can actually build this and build it well and truly have the state-of-the-art, best in the world system.

Mrs. BICE. My airport manager back home may not like this, but I am happy to let you experiment on the Oklahoma City Will Rogers International Airport on that project because I think it is crucial to ensuring safety across the Nation moving forward.

So with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Mr. WOMACK. Nice attempt to get to the front of the line. We hear you.

Ms. Watson Coleman, welcome.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize, I was at the other hearing.

Mr. Duffy, good morning to you. I come from New Jersey, so, you know I am going to ask you about the Newark airport—

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN [continuing]. Because it is very frightening what we have been experiencing. And I even know that you diverted your wife from Newark Airport to LaGuardia out of a sense of security.

Secretary DUFFY. That is not true.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. So in general and in specific—that is not true?

Secretary DUFFY. No.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Maybe, you know, we are so used to false information coming out and about this administration.

Secretary DUFFY. It is partially true. Partially true. But I will explain that one.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Okie-dokie. I want to know, specifically, what are you proposing to do to eliminate those problems that have impacted safety, security, and landing in Newark? What are you proposing as it relates to ensuring that the appropriate staffing exists in addition to the issues with infrastructure? And how do you see the timeframe taking place?

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you for the question. So I didn't—you know, I did—with all the delays at Newark, my wife had to do an event and she was in the city of New York. And so I did, I moved her from Newark to LaGuardia, not for safety, but because I needed her flight to fly. She had to get there. Now, someone had clipped some audio of that and made it seem like I was talking about safety. I fly out of Newark all the time, my family does, so.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. I accept that.

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you. Appreciate that.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you.

Secretary DUFFY. I was making the rounds, so—and it was not accurate. I know where that came from. But so here's what I am doing.

So first, the Newark, Teterboro, and Morristown used to be controlled by N90, which was in New York. Right? That had LaGuardia and JFK controlling all that airspace. It was the N90 TRACON. Last summer, the last administration moved the Newark airspace from N90 down to the Philadelphia TRACON. And I think two issues happened. They didn't test and make sure the lines were hardened, the communication was hardened when they did that. And the second is they didn't move the STARS system, which helps interpret the radar, from N90 down to Philadelphia as well. So those are the two problems. There were outages in October and November as well in Newark.

So here is what we have done. We had fiber laid at the airports. That is being—you can't just deploy it. We want to test it right now. So at the airports that is being tested today. We are working with Verizon, who have been great partners with us, to get us all fiber going from the airports down to the Philly TRACON, from Newark to Philly. I don't want to overpromise and underdeliver for you. That was going to be done actually next year, I believe, then it was going to be done in the fall, then the summer. I hope to have even better news for you, but we are working at lightning speed and pace to get this resolved in Newark again.

Today we are having, the FAA is having a conversation about how all the airlines can come together to reduce the flights at Newark, so if you book your flight, you know it is going to fly. And I do think it is important that we slow the flights because we don't want to have more flights than can be controlled in the airspace and then make this less safe. So I want this to be safe and do it at a speed that we can control.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you. So that speaks to infrastructure issues.

Secretary DUFFY. Yes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Technology issues. What about staffing issues? What about tower control staffers and the people that need to have eyes and ears and, you know, responsibilities—

Secretary DUFFY. Yes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN [continuing]. For the safety and security at the airport?

Secretary DUFFY. So I think the last administration moved it because they were having staffing issues at N90 and they thought they could better staff it at Philadelphia. That was one of the rationales.

Just to be clear. So if you have a 20-year controller, well experienced, working the Denver airspace or the Chicago airspace, and I go, hey, let's move them over to Philly TRACON and let them control Newark, you can't do that.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. So I am asking you what are you going to do about it?

Secretary DUFFY. Well, so I am trying to—so just, you know, let me make this point. You can't—it takes a year even for an experienced controller to get trained up in the New York—in the Newark airspace. You just can't move them around because they have experience as controllers. So what I have done is, I have offered, I mentioned this earlier, but I have offered to pay a bonus to air traffic controllers to not retire after 25 years, but to stay on the job. We are going to pay them 20 percent upfront cash and every year they stay, we are going to pay them. And we are supercharging, you know, young people coming into the academy. But you can't fix this overnight. I can't fix this in a couple months. This is going to take us, you know, a year, 2 years, 3 years.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Thank you, sir. So, on one hand, I see that there are cuts there proposed to the FAA budget. On the other hand, I see the IIJA budget is being cut or the access to that money is being cut. Is one trying to offset the other? When we look at what seems to be a need for an increase, something that Secretary Buttigieg responded to, we are now trying to figure out are we robbing Peter to pay Paul or are we going to add to Peter and Paul?

Secretary DUFFY. Oh, I think the budget is we are adding to Peter and Paul. The only IIJA money that was reduced was the NEVI money. That was the \$7 billion for chargers, then you didn't get chargers for the money that was spent. So that was in the budget to be taken away. But no, we are adding to the IIJA by \$1.5 billion. I forgot your question was something specific, but we have added money to it.

And, yes, again, we haven't let any controllers go. We have protected safety critical missions in the Department as—which are air traffic controllers. So we are trying to hire more air traffic—we actually have hired more air traffic controllers. We are not letting them go. We are trying to bring more online.

Mr. CLYBURN. That is such an important airport for us, for our economy, for our traveling public. Safety and security is first and foremost.

And I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the additional time and for acknowledging when I came in.

Mr. WOMACK. You are most welcome.

Secretary DUFFY. It is even more important because I fly out of there, too, all the time, so I want to make sure it works.

Mr. WOMACK. Sheriff, Mr. Rutherford.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Chairman Cole and Ranking Member, thank you all. Mr. Secretary, it is great to see you here this morning or this afternoon, I guess. But I want to talk a little bit about I saw where you had a trip to the United States Maritime Academy.

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. And that is a particular interest to me. And so I believe we share that interest with President Trump actually

in revitalizing the U.S. Maritime situation because it is not only critical to our economy, it is also critical to our national defense. And so I want to talk about the Merchant Marine Academy and how it contributes to both of those missions. And with your recent trip, I saw some comments, I think, that you had about that. I would love to hear your take on that.

And also, you know, I see a real commitment here to MARAD through the 596 plus up million. So could you talk to us a little bit about your vision and your visit to—

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah.

Mr. RUTHERFORD [continuing]. The Merchant Marine Academy and where you think we ought to be going with that?

Secretary DUFFY. So if you guys all go to Oklahoma City to tour the Academy, but also, if you all went to Kings Point, these kids here are some of the most amazing young men and women that I—and I have a lot of kids and met a lot of kids, these are some of the most amazing kids I have met. And they are—this Academy is unworthy to have the name America associated with it. It is dilapidated. The kids went 4 months without hot water. They had cold showers for 4 months at an American Maritime Academy. They are eating off of paper plates, if they even get a plate, because the dishwasher is broken. I mean, that we would allow that to happen for young people in this country who want to serve their country. And they are smart and they are strong and they are dedicated. And so I have committed to them. I want to fight for them. And I think all of you, if you saw the kind of young people that are there and the kind of heart that they have, you, too, would want to fight for them.

And it is important because, one, if we are going to build ships in America, which I hope we do, we need young mariners to sail those ships. And these kids are amazing that come out. But also, if we have time of conflict, they are the mariners that support the military, moving goods and actually people as well, to support the military. So we need them. And by the way, a lot of them also will then finish the Academy and enlist in the armed services, too.

So if you go, there is mold. There is just—it is just—it has been forgotten. And my commitment is, and I don't—maybe I shouldn't say this publicly, but I will, I want to keep the Merchant Marine Academy at DOT. I think we can serve them very well. I think this committee can serve them well. If we can't serve them, I think we should give them up. We should give them to the Marines. I don't want to do that, but they deserve better than what they are getting, and it is an American priority.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Yes, they do. Thank you. I am really glad to hear that. And I also want to acknowledge the \$105 million additional for upgrading some of our shipyards, because we absolutely have to improve on that.

I would like to switch gears here and ask you about another issue. In Jacksonville, Florida, which I represent, the transportation authority there has become a leader in autonomous vehicle circulators, the U2C program there, the ultimate—it is called the ultimate urban circulator. And autonomous vehicles play a big role in that.

And I know as we look to our highway systems even, autonomous vehicles are going to start to play a part, I think, even in our dray situations. So can you talk just a little bit about DOT's—how do you see DOT playing into the nationwide plan for autonomous vehicles?

Secretary DUFFY. So some people think of us at DOT as hard hats and the orange vests. I think we are one of the most innovative places in all of government right now with autonomous vehicles, eVTOLs, or the Ubers in the air, and drone technology. So, if we don't have the right rules in place allowing this technology to advance at the right speed, you can't let them go too fast, you can't have them go too slow, but if we don't do it here, China's going to do it. And as this technology develops, we are going to use Chinese products in the U.S. for autonomous vehicles, which, by the way, I think poses a grave national security risk to the country.

And so we are working to get the right information with those who are making autonomous vehicles and want to allow them to deploy those vehicles and test those vehicles as the technology advances. And I do think we need one national standard. You can't have, you know, 50 states with 50 different standards. We need to let them develop to one standard. And that is what we are doing at DOT.

And by the way, they have been—the innovators have been very cooperative with us, giving us the information that we asked for, so we can make the right rules around the vehicles.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. And my time is up. I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Aguilar.

Mr. AGUILAR. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Appreciate the opportunity. Welcome, Mr. Secretary. Thank you for being here, Mr. and Mrs. Lilley, as well.

Mr. Secretary, as the chairmen mentioned, chairman of the full committee and the chairman of the subcommittee, safety is of primary concern to all of us. You see that in the questions that are being asked by both sides. I can't help but, you know, ask you to reflect. You know, it is been reported that you have pushed back against some DOGE efforts, you know, with respect to staffing. I want to ensure you have said that safety is first.

As the chairman mentioned, notification of Congress is also an important authority and responsibility that you have implementing these grants. I agree, it is a time-honored tradition to point the fingers at your predecessor. It is something we do quite often, you know, here up on this dais and in this dome. But the importance of doing all of those jobs, safety notification, grant awards, is the responsibility of your Department. And with fewer people, I hope you can continue to execute those important missions.

In January, California experienced horrific wildfires. And the devastation was so huge, it is tough to comprehend. Pictures don't do it justice. In February, the governor of California requested \$101 million under the Department of Transportation's emergency relief program to help rebuild Federal highways, bridges, and roads. Congress is waiting for the President to request of Congress to pass a disaster supplemental that includes funding for Southern

California. It is been months since the wildfires occurred. We haven't seen anything, a pro forma request of Congress.

Do you have any updates on a status of a request, Mr. Secretary? And have you seen some of the damage? Is it a tour that you are open to seeing with your own eyes in Southern California?

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah, I am absolutely open to a tour. My son lives in the area and actually had to evacuate with a new baby. I was well aware of it on a personal level how devastating the fires were. I could get some additional information and start circle back with you. I don't have it for you right now, though.

Mr. AGUILAR. Specific to that line item, though, you are confident in the DOT's ability to implement that funding if Congress adds the additional dollars for the emergency relief program?

Secretary DUFFY. So I would—I am confident that I am at the staffing levels to accomplish the mission of the Department. And again, that is responsive to all of you. That is responsive to a President who wants me to be able to support the builds in America. So, yes.

Mr. AGUILAR. Do you know how committed the administration is to executing disaster assistance without preconditions? We wouldn't put preconditions on tornadoes and floods, hurricanes. Why would we do it in this case?

Secretary DUFFY. I haven't had that conversation with the administration.

Mr. AGUILAR. Okay. Thank you. Over the next couple years, Southern California will also be host to the World Cup in 2026, Super Bowl in 2027, and the Olympics and Paralympic Games in 2028. You yourself have called these America's Games. L.A. Metro estimates that the region will need over \$3 billion in Federal funding over the next 3 years to ensure public transportation network can support the athletes, the staff, the ticketholders, and residents just for the Olympics alone. Last year, the Senate included \$200 million in transportation funding for the Olympics. President Trump signed a CR; that funding was not included in the final funding package.

Earlier this month, the California delegation and a couple of us here on the dais joined in sending a letter to the President asking for a budget request that included \$500 million in dedicated infrastructure funding for the Olympics. Can you comment on the steps status of how you view the Olympics from a dollars-and-cents perspective? And will you commit to work with the California delegation as we work through fiscal year 2026 and prepare for the '28 Olympics and these other events?

Secretary DUFFY. They are going to be great. And so our Department is working with the White House. They have a task force for the World Cup as well as for the Olympics, and transportation is a key part of moving people where we have these massive events. And so, we are no doubt going to partner with California and your needs and with the administration. And again, you guys have the "power of the purse." I would look forward to all of us thinking through what those needs are because, again, this is our presentation to the world. The world is going to come for both the World Cup and the Olympics. And I know the President wants to have a great showing, a seamless showing. And, you know, I think we

want to invite the world for, even for this summer, for the club games. And to have them come in and, by the way, spend a lot of their money would be wonderful, but they have to have a wonderful experience with it. So we are going to support the communities across the country with their transportation.

Mr. AGUILAR. You would support a funding level of around that 500—

Secretary DUFFY. Oh, I don't know.

Mr. AGUILAR [continuing]. For fiscal year 2026?

Secretary DUFFY. I don't know. I haven't looked at the funding levels and what is appropriate from the Department's perspective. But I want to make sure we have enough resources to make sure it is seamless. And I would love to work with you if you have some ideas.

Mr. AGUILAR. I mean, I appreciate the comment that it is going to be great, but, you know, this body works with—with funding formulas and tables and real dollars out on the street to implement all the—all the happy talk. So I just—

Secretary DUFFY. Of course.

Mr. AGUILAR [continuing]. Want to make sure.

Secretary DUFFY. We have a skinny budget we were talking about today. So I, you know, I am happy to talk to you about it, but that was not on the calendar for today. And so, if you want me to look at the numbers, I will look at them and we can partner up together.

Mr. AGUILAR. Happy to work with you.

Secretary DUFFY. You as well.

Mr. AGUILAR. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WOMACK. You bet, Pete. Mr. Gonzalez.

Mr. GONZALES. Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Welcome back to the House. Your testimony has been a breath of fresh air. I think one of the things that the last administration failed to do, the secret sauce, was transparency. That is all the American people want. Good, bad, ugly, just give us the truth. I want to start—I am an optimistic person. I want to start with the future. And in my eyes, the future is commercial space travel. And I view the world sometimes the answer is not more money. Sometimes the answer is the government getting out of the way and allowing industries to just take hold. And so in particular, you know, SpaceX has launched successfully nearly 500 rockets. You know, this isn't a what-if. We are already there. And so, my question is, what can DOT do in particular to ensure that the United States of America is the leader and the winner in this commercial space battle, if you will?

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah, that is a great question. I know the FAA had thought through, you know, and this was in the last administration, but to think through how they could streamline the process for permits with space travel. And I have just met with a very prominent company, not SpaceX, but a different one. And they are like, this is a worse—it got worse; it didn't get better. And so we have to make sure—we need to have a permitting process. We need to have rules and regulations in place. But it has become so complicated and so redundant, and different agencies making these

companies do the same thing over again, taking years as opposed to a couple of months, is a huge problem.

So this meeting that took place yesterday, I have tasked the FAA to go back and look at how we are going through the permitting process and the approval process because, again, this is crucial. By the way, we are leading right now. You look at SpaceX and Blue Origin and others, we are leading, but we want to make sure we stay in the lead. And you can't have government getting in the way of—needlessly in the way of this advancement.

Mr. GONZALES. I would welcome hosting you in Texas. Blue Origin is in my district. They, you know, we are literally launching rockets from West Texas and South Texas as well. Once again, I think this is an area that is worth talking about. I am a retired, you know, professional cryptologist. When you have big problems, oftentimes the answer is look towards technology. It is a—it is an equalizer.

I want to, now I want to bring it back kind of home base a little bit, and I want to, you know, piggyback off of what Rogers said earlier about rural, rural infrastructure. One of my counties, Reeves County, produces more natural gas than anywhere else in the country. Okay? And in that area, the infrastructure is just completely worn down. There is a highway from Reeves to Loving County that we call "death highway." And if you have ever been on that highway, you know why it is death highway. I mean, when I am there, I am telling my team, put your phones down, 10 and 2. You know, it is—it is a very scary situation. My question is what does infrastructure near critical resources like oil and gas industries, we have talked about, you know, energy independence, where does this fall on your priority list?

Secretary DUFFY. Well, first of all, for the President as well, he cares about oil and gas and making sure we are leading the world. And if we have extra to be able to export, especially LNG. But one of the problems I think we have is up to 40 percent of the money that is spent from all of you on these projects goes to consultants and permitting, 40 percent. I mean, if we could get that to 15 percent, that means you guys all get to build more projects. We get more grant money out the door. And I think we do have to spend smarter and spend better. And again, that doesn't mean we don't do things right. We don't do—you don't say, hey, we should look out for the environment? Should we look out for the right permits? Of course, but we can do that with less money. And the consulting class that is built up almost seems to be bigger than the construction class around these projects. So that is—we are looking at permitting reform right now and how can we delegate more authority to states to do some of the work because we think they can move faster and more efficiently than the Federal Government.

Mr. GONZALES. Excellent. I mean, and I look forward to working together. I bring that up because oftentimes rural America gets forgotten in this equation. One when they produce a lot of these very critical resources. You know, I met with a woman there in Pecos County who she—her number one ask was son—she said, Tony, my son is terrified to start driving. He is 15 years old. It is a reasonable ask to have, you know, our children not be terrified to drive on our highways.

So the last thing, and we could take this back. Once again, I would like to build—build upon this. I am almost out of time. But the Del Rio Airport is very important to me. We have not had an airline in there since 2022. The reason why I mentioned Del Rio, Texas, is because it is along the border. It is critical infrastructure. When you talk about border security, Laughlin Air Force Base has a lot of nodes in there. As we look towards that, I look forward to working together on how we can, you know, restart this rural kind of airlines in there.

Secretary DUFFY. I appreciate that. Look forward to that.

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

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Espallat.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Secretary Duffy, for being here. I also want to thank the family, the Lilley family, for being here. Our prayers and our hearts go out to you and the memory of your son. That tragic accident at Reagan Airport. I myself was on a plane with four of my other colleagues that witnessed the wing being clipped by another flight as we stood on the runway at the airport. So air traffic safety is critical.

My district, which has Harlem, East Harlem, Washington Heights, and the Northwest Bronx, stands sort of like in the center of LaGuardia, Newark, Teterboro, Westchester, and even JFK. So all of that air traffic flies right above my district. And Secretary, recently staffing delays and system malfunctions at New York Airport have caused obviously significant delays and safety concerns. To adequately address this issue and general air traffic control modernization initiatives, industry experts believe that at minimum, at minimum, we need to invest \$30 billion. Now, we have seen the President's discretionary skinny budget call for \$18 billion. Now, you yourself had explained the archaic condition of equipment. Newark is going through a runway reconstruction. The system, the operation, was moved to Philadelphia. That is going to require additional dollars. And of course, we need to train air traffic controllers, and that is not going to be able to be done in a—in a—overnight. So if the experts are saying that we need \$30 billion, how do you expect to do all of this with the proposed skinny budget of \$18 billion?

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you for that question. And so, as we go through the budget process, we are going to have to have a conversation because I think this is very special, what we need to do here. And I would hope that we could have that conversation before October 1st.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. So you recognize that the skinny budget falls short of where we need to be?

Secretary DUFFY. So the skinny budget isn't the ask that I am going to have of all of you to rebuild this whole system. By the way, we had 55 different groups, unions, industries, and airlines. All—they don't sit on the same side of the table. They all came together and said, this is—this is an American moment. And so, yeah, it is not—it is not in the skinny budget. I am going to need you all to take this up as a—as a special priority.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. This is not a cheap endeavor if you are saying that there is radars that are from the 70s and 80s, that you have copper lines, and that you have—

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah.

Mr. ESPAILLAT [continuing]. Of course, the training, the major task of training air traffic controllers at the level that we need to ensure that there is safety. We are going to have to have deep pockets for this, but we are not hearing that from the White House. They are not—their fiscal commitment has not been shown to be there. Their skinny budget is at \$18 billion. And that compromises, if we were to stay at that level, it would compromise the safety of Americans. And so I would hope and look forward to working with you and making sure that we come up with a real ask that will lead to that kind of improvement.

On another end—

Secretary DUFFY. Congressman, I can say you—you guys all spent \$1.2 trillion, and this was a known—known problem, and virtually none of it went to go towards this infrastructure. And so the President has talked about this. I talked to him this morning from—he called me from Saudi Arabia. He cares about this. But, but yeah, you are right, it is not here. We are going to have to have another conversation about how we do it.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. I am glad you acknowledged that the skinny budget falls short and I am glad you brought up—

Secretary DUFFY. It doesn't fall short. It just doesn't include it.

Mr. ESPAILLAT [continuing]. The infrastructure bill, because my next question is localities across the Nation are expecting Federal transit grants to complete capital projects. Can you confirm for the record that you will honor the department's existing full funding grant agreements? I mean, people across the country are waiting for these agreements to be honored.

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah. So, yeah, there has been a couple of grant agreements that I am not going to honor. Right. There is some with some studies that we are going to do in certain universities that I don't think that they provide good use for the Federal taxpayer. But I can't—I haven't come across a slew of—of issues that I wouldn't fund. Again, I might not fully agree with them, but the last administration announced them, and you expect them, and by and large, these are all going to get grant agreements. But just so you know, there is this massive backlog. I wish it would have been done before I got there, but I am going to work with the whole Congress.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. In many ways, this is like, you know, you are a—you are a—I am a baseball fan. So you can sit on the stands in the legend seats and say that hit—that hitter, that batter should have hit the ball to left field and move the runner to second base. But when you stand there at the plate, Secretary, you see that the ball is coming at you 100 miles an hour, and in terms of the size of an aspirin, you got to hit it. You are at the plate.

Secretary DUFFY. Oh, I know I am at the plate.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Okay.

Secretary DUFFY. But I just—but I just don't want to see is you try to say that in 100 days these issues came my way. Let's not say that. We are getting through them. I was left 3,200. So recognize that and then go, good for you for you already got almost \$10 billion out the door and you have—you have done almost over—over 400 of them. Good speed, go faster.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. I look forward—

Secretary DUFFY. But to try to blame it like I am trying to hold things up, freeze things, is not accurate. So let's not do that.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. I look forward to working together.

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you. You, too.

Mr. WOMACK. Now batting, Ryan Zinke.

Mr. ZINKE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Secretary Duffy is a pleasure to see you again.

Secretary DUFFY. You as well.

Mr. ZINKE. I want to thank you for stepping up to service once again. We have served together in the House. I look forward to serving together here. I guess, you know, you are from Wisconsin, you are from northern Wisconsin, and I am sure you are attuned to the problems of rural America.

Secretary DUFFY. Yes.

Mr. ZINKE. And in the news, we—we see that, you know, a lot of times urban America gets all the news because we are close to Washington, D.C. But, you know, rural America, I can tell you our bridges and roads are falling apart. In Montana, for instance, we have a little bridge called Noxon Bridge, the only bridge to a wonderful little city that was built in 1922 over the Clark Fork River. And over about 100 years, that bridge is going to fall in. The bridge itself has not—it can't sustain a full load of kids in a bus. And then, of course, in Montana, we have the saying that whiskey is for drinking, water is for fighting. And a lot of our infrastructure is on water, which is the headwaters of the Missouri River, which feeds into the Mississippi. It is a nice thing to have a lot of water flowing. So I would just, after your commitment, I am all about slashing bureaucracy, but I want your commitment that we are going to slash bureaucracy and not urban projects that are important.

Secretary DUFFY. So I am not about slashing projects. I am about we want to build. So, and I do care, like you, about rural America. 100 percent. But I mean, I do think at some point we have to ask the question. Remember, I don't know when you ran for Congress. In 2009—was it 2010?—they passed the stimulus bill under the Obama era. And then you had \$1.2 trillion in the last Congress. And so that is \$2 trillion over 10 years. And sometimes you look around the country and go, where did \$2 trillion go? Where is all the infrastructure? Why don't we have more? And I think it does—a lot of this money gets eaten up in—in, again, the permitting and the consultants. And I want to see more of the money go, you know, to turn dirt. That is what we have to focus on. And if we do that, I think there should be money for all of our projects. But if it gets eaten up just by the consultant class, all of us lose. All of our communities lose because they don't have the resources to build your bridge that can't take a busload of kids.

Mr. ZINKE. I appreciate that. I appreciate your commitment to rural America. Sometimes we are fly over and our voice isn't heard.

And UAVs, you know, I was a Navy SEAL. I have been dealing with UAVs for 2004. And by and large, the FAA has not moved on airspace in 2 decades. Well, the rest of the world is. And as you know, UAVs are incredibly important for efficiency on pipeline surveys, on wildlife surveys, on agriculture, and precision. And yet we are still line of sight. I understand the complicated—I understand

that there is complications in safety, but if you don't fly, there is no risk. And that is more or less where the FAA has been for years and years and years. Are you committed to looking at technology and integrating UAVs into the NAS?

Secretary DUFFY. I am excited about this. I would just say stay tuned. Very short order, you are going to see our—the work that we have been doing. So that is going to happen. But absolutely, this is new technology. We actually have to have rules that allow it to be deployed and deployed safely. By the way, this gets to be, I mean, again, we see what is going on in Russia and Ukraine. These are tools for commerce, these are tools for industry, but they also can be tools of war. And so thinking through how we do it with the military, what is the military side and what is the commerce side, and navigating that effectively is really important. But again, if we don't—if we don't allow this technology here, it will be developed in the rest of the world and then used here. And you don't want drone technology from somewhere else flying in American airspace. So I am with you on that.

And beyond visual line of sight, I mean people are getting coffees now by drone or their Amazon packages delivered by drone. We want to have again one national standard on how these companies can deploy across the country. And just on the air traffic control upgrade that we are going to do, it is going to bring more efficiency to the airspace. So you can integrate these eVTOLs, and you can integrate drone technology as well. So the airspace is going to get more complicated. You can't navigate it with what we have today. But what we are going to build, we can accommodate what you are talking about.

Mr. ZINKE. And I just, as a comment, if you are going to move the merchant marine, which I think is a magnificent experience. It is the highest paid. The highest-paid undergraduate degree in this country is merchant marine. And by the way, when you graduate academy, you can cross-deck to any other commission source. It is a great academy. But if you are going to move it, I would suggest the United States Navy, not the United States Marine Corps. With that, I yield back.

Secretary DUFFY. Duly noted. But just a note if you have a young person that wants to consider going. The kids that are graduating are making \$150 to \$180,000 working 6 months a year or maybe a month on, month off. But it is really good money because they are highly skilled. Good point. I don't want to give them up, by the way. I want to keep them.

Mr. ZINKE. But, and if, Mr. Chairman, if you could just allow me another second. And also in the Merchant Marine Academy because they do rotate 4 on, 4 off; 4 weeks on, 4 weeks off. They are in Montana, the kids that do it. Best hunting season, best fishing season, best summer. It is the greatest job ever. I would like to be a merchant marine.

Secretary DUFFY. That is right. Right after Wisconsin.

Mr. WOMACK. Preceding paid for by the visitors bureau of the great state of Montana. Mr. Ciscomani.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Secretary Duffy, for—for being here. I also want to welcome Mr. Tim and Sheri Lilley for being here and sorry for your loss. Something

we want to address and make sure that none of that happens ever again.

Mr. Secretary, I remember the first conversation we had. This is back when I was considering this job, and you called, and you said, from a father of six, when I took this job, to another father of six, you can do it. And you even said that you had more kids when you were on the job. I didn't follow that example. I stayed at six. But it was great knowing you then and meeting you and understanding your passion for families and for our country. And what drives you, I think, drives many of us in this committee as well. So I want to thank you for that.

And I want to start by addressing an issue that is a top priority for everyone here in the subcommittee, obviously, which is aviation safety, and we have been talking about that quite a bit. I really appreciate the prioritization you give this issue in your budget request. I want to highlight a tragic incident that happened in one of—in my district, you may be aware of it. On February 19th of this year, two small aircraft crashed midair, resulting in the death of two individuals in Marana, Arizona. It is critical that the Federal Government works to ensure that something like this never occurs again. I know that is your focus and passion. So can you talk a little bit about and provide an update on how your budget proposal will ensure incidents like this do not occur again, especially in smaller rural airports that are regional and with less resources?

Secretary DUFFY. That was tragic. This was in an uncontrolled airspace, so controllers don't control every aspect of the airspace. A lot of the small airports, like in Hayward, Wisconsin, where I am from, oftentimes it is—it is done by pilots and visually and staying away from each other. And by the way, I don't think general aviation would like air traffic controllers to control every aspect of the airspace. They do like the freedom of movement, but it then creates risks like we saw in your community, where two planes collided midair. But that is a conversation of what should that role be and should it be expanded. I am happy to have that. And I don't know what the—

Mr. CISCOMANI. The resources part of it.

Secretary DUFFY. Oh.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Of how, and the budget, how it addresses some of this.

Secretary DUFFY. Well, the resources are—this is—this is all inclusive. And again, it is the infrastructure, and it is the manpower of air traffic controllers.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Yeah.

Secretary DUFFY. And this is what we have been talking about. And we want to work with all of you to pressure test the numbers that we are thinking about. It is important. It is also what we are seeing, I mean, as Mr. Quigley noted in Chicago, we had a near miss with the Southwest airplane, and it was, I would think it would be the next—the Flexjet wasn't paying attention to the air traffic controller. But I do think we need our pilots to pay attention. This can be very dangerous and a lot of the pilots who fly commercially take people's lives in their hands. And it is a serious business, and we want to make sure that all of them are taking it that way.

Another thing that we need in part of rural America, we got to think through how we are building out the infrastructure of towers and TRACONs. I think, on average, we build one a year. It is going to take us 400 years to replace all of the towers and TRACONs in this country. We want to up that. We would like to do four or five a year. I mean, up the speed to update the old infrastructure. And a lot of you have those facilities around your districts that—that need work. And so, if we could start the process every year of getting four or five of them, I think would be well on the way.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Thank you. On the same line of resources, another incident that happened in Arizona, the New Mexico border as well, is the train carrying cars of hazardous materials fell off the tracks. This was back in April of last year. Caught fire in several Arizona and New Mexico residents, as well as Navajo Nation tribal members had to be evacuated from their homes. Not only was this impactful and negatively to the economy, but also to just posing major health concerns and issues here. So also on the—on the budget and resources side in terms of freight and rail, can you speak a little bit on that aspect as well?

Secretary DUFFY. So again, I am not familiar exactly with the one incident that you are referencing, but I think all of us heard of East Palestine. And again, I do think as we think through FRA and PHMSA, in looking at how products that can be dangerous are moving across the rail, how we—how we navigate the rail, and what safety policies and procedures we have in place. You are seeing some very exciting advancements in technology around rail, that again, what we might miss by the human eye, this technology is picking up, and we are actually able to deploy resources and deploy fixes before a derailment could happen, and I think that is critical. Using the manpower along with the technology is going to, I think, bring us more safety.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Thank you so much. I do want to just also thank you for the I-10 completion and process that we want to be sure that we complete here on the widening and the grants. That is a very important highway for not only Arizona but the entire Nation. And look forward to hosting you in Arizona soon. Maybe it is not as cool in the summer as Montana, but any other time of the year will be great to visit.

Secretary DUFFY. It is pretty awesome in January.

Mr. CISCOMANI. Yes, it is. We will see you then. Thanks.

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Strong.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Chairman Womack, and Ranking Member Clyburn, for holding this important hearing today. It is an honor to serve with each of you. I also want to thank our subcommittee staff for all of their hard work. Secretary Duffy, thank you for being here today and for your work and dedication to our Nation and for making yourself available to members of Congress.

As you know, my district, Huntsville, Alabama, is home to Redstone Arsenal, which is the premier aerospace, ballistic missile, law enforcement, and military asset located in North Alabama. More than 50,000 military members, contractors, and public servants commute to Redstone Arsenal and the second-largest research park in the country every day. Secretary Duffy, can you tell us how your

agency plans to invest in the projects surrounding key national security installations such as Redstone Arsenal?

Secretary DUFFY. Are we talking ports?

Mr. STRONG. Roads, airports, ports, all.

Secretary DUFFY. I can't tell you specifically around that facility, but I would be happy to discuss what the needs are with you to again calculate those needs and resources to further the conversation.

Mr. STRONG. Alabama's 5th Congressional District is also home to Huntsville International Airport, which I am proud to say was just named the number one best small airport for the second year in a row. It serves 1.47 million passengers annually and has the second-longest runway in the Southeast United States and is the only FAA-licensed commercial space reentry site in the United States. Small hub airports such as Huntsville International Airport are a vital link in the National Air Transportation System and their success is crucial for connectivity and regional economic development. Secretary Duffy, can you share with us how your agency is working with small hub airports to better understand their specific regulatory and operational challenges?

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah, listen, I think we look across the country at what facilities we have in place and what needs each of those facilities have based on the number of people, the number of flights they serve. And so, specifically in Huntsville, we would be happy to discuss that further with you. But again, we have to go through a priority list of what are the oldest infrastructure that we have in regard to airports, and how do we effectively use the money that you give us to do the appropriate upgrades and think long-term what project comes at what time. So if you have special needs in your community, I would be happy to discuss those with you.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. Do you have the resources needed to help ensure that small hub airports can effectively access and utilize Federal funding?

Secretary DUFFY. Well, I think we can always use more money. I don't know that you guys all want to give. But you know what? We are going to do more with less. And again, I have to just, if I am honest with you, I am sure the FAA has done this. I have been with, in the 106 days or 105 days that I have been here, we have been focused on a couple of big issues with regard to what is wrong with the national airspace, how do we control it, what is happening with controllers. We dealt with multiple incidents, from what happened at DCA to what happened in Alaska and Toronto. The mid-air collision that Mr. Ciscomani mentioned, I think it was the Motley Crue plane, also crashed in Arizona. So there is been a lot of aviation. I will go back and talk to the FAA about specific needs across the country.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. As you know, timing and predictability are critical to efficient airport capital planning. Could you talk a little bit about the department, what the department is doing to provide consistency and transparency in the timing of funding—funding awards, especially for small to mid-size airports?

Secretary DUFFY. Yeah, I know that we just got a big tranche of grants out from the FAA again across the country for airport improvements. But again, as I mentioned throughout the hearing, the

backlog is substantial that was passed off to me. A lot of announcements, a lot of celebration with the announcements, but that is the easy part. The work is actually getting the grant agreements done, and we are going through that now, and we are going to—we are going to get there. We are working at it. And we are going to get more announcements as each month goes by, but it is taking time just because of the volume that was left for me.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. In addition to commercial aviation, my district is also home to the Port of Huntsville. This is a multimodal hub that integrates air, cargo, rail, and industrial development around the JetPlex Industrial Park. The JetPlex Industrial Park supports hundreds of aerospace, automotive, and advanced manufacturing industries. Over 400 companies rely on this port to provide timely and efficient service to their operations and supply chain. How is your department prioritizing and investing in projects that will strengthen and safeguard key domestic supply chain and logistic hubs?

Secretary DUFFY. This body, I believe, gave us the FLOW initiative, so we are able to get companies to coordinate shippers with the industry to coordinate what kind of needs are going to be in the system, and it is multimodal. And again, those tools actually have been working very well that the Congress gave us, and we are trying to expand that, but industry loves it. And again, planning for the needs that we have throughout the country and the capacity excess and shortfalls is, I think, critical. And the tool that, again, this body has given the department, I think, has been working very, very well. And again, we want to grow it.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. Chairman Womack, I yield.

Mr. WOMACK. Thank you, Dale. That completes our first round of questions, and I did say earlier in the hearing that we would have a second round if somebody wanted to. I am going to waive any opportunity that I might take to ask another question, but if there is anybody on the dais that does have a desire to ask another question or get a quick response, I would be willing to recognize them. Ideally, first to Mr. Clyburn, the ranking member.

Mr. CLYBURN. I will follow your lead, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. WOMACK. Okay. All right. The full committee chairman, Mr. Cole.

The CHAIRMAN. One quick point we didn't have a chance to cover, but I would just ask you, as you put things together, you take a strong look at. We made a lot of progress here in fiscal year 2024 on tribal roads, and we actually went back, and there have been no hearings on tribal roads or tribal housing for 20 years. And we had seen how tribal roads and tribal housing had fallen behind in that period. I have spent a lot of time on Native American reservations. I know in Wisconsin, you know a lot about Native Americans, but with the Federal obligation here, and it is a relatively small part of your budget, it is around 1 percent, so we are not talking about something massive, but some money here makes a difference. And this committee, and, frankly, administrations, on a bipartisan basis, have overlooked this area for a generation. And believe me, it is really bad in some of these places. You are thinking you are not in a third-world country, you are in the wilderness. So I would just ask you, I know you have got to make some tough

funding decisions, and we are going to try and be supportive of those, and we are going to try and help you in other ways. But please take a special look at that. Don't let it get lost over there because that is what tends to happen. Sort of out of sight, out of mind. And I have watched generations of politicians on both sides of the aisle do that. This committee made a big step forward in 2024 and would have again in 2025 had the bill happened, and so I don't want to lose that momentum. So if you just consider that as you go about all the many decisions you have to make, I would be very grateful.

Secretary DUFFY. I appreciate you bringing that up. I understood the housing needs and the infrastructure needs across the Tribal Lands in the country. Senator Ben Ray Luján mentioned it as well. I think we should work together on thinking how we can spend money well and where the most needs are. Because you are right, it is not third world. Oftentimes it is wilderness. And I think again, a lot of—some places you may not need the investments, but there are other places that—that truly need the investment, and they haven't received it. So I will work with you on that.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

Mr. WOMACK. Ms. Torres.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. Oops. Seems like all the equipment is faulty around here. Once again, I would like to go back to our conversation over the closure of the PHMSA, or it has not been closed, the lease is supposed to expire in August. But I would like to have more information about the assessment that was done to come up with a decision that it would be a good decision to close this facility, given the fact that the nearest facility is 1,000 miles away. I also, for the record, Mr. Chairman, I would like to include this AP article dated February 19th of 2025.

Mr. WOMACK. Without objection.

[The information follows:]

Associated Press News Article Link: <https://apnews.com/article/faa-firings-trump-doge-safety-airlines-27390c6a7aac58063652302df5a243d3>

AP WORLD U.S. POLITICS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT BUSINESS SCIENCE MORE

POLITICS

Some of the 400 jobs that were cut at the FAA helped support air safety, a union says



1 of 2 | Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy in the James Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House, Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, in Washington. (AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin)

BY **TARA COPP**
Updated 2:18 PM EDT, February 19, 2025

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WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump's administration has said no one at the Federal Aviation Administration with a "critical safety" position has been fired as it cuts the federal workforce, but [some FAA jobs that were eliminated](#) had direct roles in supporting safety inspectors and airport operations, according to their union and former employees.

About 400 personnel were let go starting Friday. There is still not a complete picture of who was fired, but the union representing about 130 of them said the staffers included aviation safety assistants, maintenance mechanics and nautical information specialists.

They are the types of workers tasked with helping aircraft safety inspectors, repairing air traffic control facilities and updating digital maps that pilots use in flight, such as making any changes that the FAA may direct for airplanes flying in Washington airspace following [last month's fatal midair collision](#).

FAA Administrator Sean Duffy said over the weekend that no air traffic controllers or critical safety personnel were cut.

"We protected roles that are critical to safety," Department of Transportation spokesperson Halee Dobbins said Wednesday. "On the layoffs, these were probationary employees — meaning they had only been at the FAA for less than two years, represented less than 1% of FAA's more than 45,000 employees."

Philip Mann, a former FAA certified technician, said whether someone's position is defined as "critical to safety" can come down to whether that person is authorized to perform a certified inspection of the equipment being worked on.

While those who were fired were not those doing those inspections, they supported that work.

"It's a stretch, but that is usually where they can draw a line to say, 'If you can certify stuff, then you have a safety critical job. And if you don't certify stuff, you don't have a safety critical job,'" Mann said.

But the loss of those personnel "is going to have long-term safety implications — just work that simply can't be done," he said.

It comes as Americans' [confidence in air travel has fallen](#) since a U.S. Army Black Hawk helicopter and an American Airlines passenger jet collided in January at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, according to an [Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research](#) poll released Wednesday.

The poll shows that 64% of U.S. adults say plane travel is "very safe" or "somewhat safe." That's [down slightly from last year](#), when 71% said that. About 2 in 10 U.S. adults now say air transportation is very or somewhat unsafe, up from 12% in 2024.

Meanwhile, in the firings, 18 air traffic control facilities lost maintenance mechanics, employees who work on electronic issues and other building repairs at those facilities, said David Spero, president of the Professional Aviation Specialists Association, a union representing about 130 of the roughly 400 FAA staffers who were fired.

Work on critical infrastructure like radars could be affected because the certified technicians responsible for those systems may now have to absorb the maintenance mechanics' responsibilities.

"All of these people are part of the safety net," Spero said. "The more of them that are not there, the more difficult it becomes to do the actual safety oversight."

The cuts to nautical aviation specialists mean updating digital maps used by pilots will take longer. For airline safety inspections, aviation safety assistants "are like a paralegal to a lawyer," Spero said. They do the paperwork so the inspector focuses on the airplane.

There were 26 assistants cut, and each one is typically supporting 10 safety inspectors at a time. Spero said the added paperwork will likely fall to inspectors, increasing the time it takes to get an aircraft checked.

“They’re not going to be able to do as much oversight of those industries as they were doing before,” Spero said.

The same added workload will affect certified technicians, Mann said.

“As short-staffed as air traffic controllers are, there are about three air traffic controllers for every technician,” Mann said.

The FAA is already short-staffed — federal officials [have been raising concerns](#) about an overtaxed and understaffed air traffic control system for years, and even major airports that used to have round-the-clock coverage with technicians no longer do.

Spero said a temporary power outage on a radar at Chicago O’Hare International Airport last July caused a ground stop there and at five surrounding airports because air traffic controllers weren’t getting an accurate feed on planes’ locations. There was no technician on duty with the skills to reset it.

The union did not know details of the other positions among the roughly 400 that were cut. Some of the staffers were part of FAA programs supporting other agencies, such as [a classified early warning radar system](#) in Hawaii meant to detect incoming cruise missiles that was being worked on with the Defense Department.

Trump, a Republican, has implemented [sweeping changes](#) in the first weeks of his second administration, from firing career agency employees to freezing trillions of dollars in federal grant funds, as he tries to make good on his campaign promise to root out [fraud, waste and abuse](#) in the federal government. Trump adviser Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, is leading the effort to cut the federal government.

The rapid firings across the government have caught leaders at some agencies off guard. In some cases, the firings generated immediate backlash and staffers were directed to return to work, including at [the National Nuclear Security Administration](#), which is responsible for nuclear warheads.

“What I would hope is that the FAA would reinstate these people,” Spero said. “And then if they need to assess the size of the government, actually, the FAA can do it in a thoughtful and methodical way to make a determination as to what are the impacts to aviation safety.”



TARA COPP

Copp covers the Pentagon and national security for the Associated Press. She has reported from Afghanistan, Iraq, throughout the Middle East, Europe and Asia.



Mrs. TORRES. That talks about the 400 personnel. I am going to give it to you. I am going to hand this over to you. Mr. Secretary, just so you know, I am not here to fight with you. I am here to ask the tough questions. No one wants to see planes crashing. No one wants to be that person who receives that call. No one wants to be in this position when 200 or 60 or, you know, whatever number of people either perish or planes continue to crash. So all I am asking is for us to take a step back and look at the massive work that you have ahead of you. And I want to recognize that you have a massive job ahead of you. But given the fact that DOGE has come in and made decisions, probably without even communicating those decisions with you, I want to believe that we are in all of this—all of us are in this together. And it is going to take all of us to push back to ensure that positions, whether they are air traffic controllers or the people fixing the equipment behind the scenes, just because we don't see them or hear from them doesn't mean that they are not critical positions. So with that, I am going to yield back, and I look forward to continuing this conversation with you.

Secretary DUFFY. On your facility, I will—I will get briefed on that—

Mrs. TORRES. Okay.

Secretary DUFFY [continuing]. And coordinate with you and get back to you. So I don't have a good answer for you right now.

Mrs. TORRES. No, I understand.

Secretary DUFFY. And in regard to the—to the 400, again, I think it—maybe I misunderstood. I thought you were saying there are air traffic controllers.

Mrs. TORRES. Yeah.

Secretary DUFFY. And they are not—

Mrs. TORRES. No.

Secretary DUFFY. I don't know what the reference was. And if I could just make one, there are 46,000 employees at the FAA. There is—it is a huge agency. A lot of them do good work. But if I can do things more efficiently in some spaces, I want to do that. But there are critical safety missions that we have, and I am going to make sure those folks not only stay, but we build upon that. And I just, to your point, this is—this is not partisan, air traffic control. What we have to do, it's an American problem. Everyone I have talked to on both sides of the aisle are, like, how do we work together? And I think that is the mentality we are going to have to have to embrace each other and serve everyone who flies. Our families, our neighbors, our communities. And I look forward to working with all of you on how we do that together, because it is, this is not a partisan, it is an American moment.

Mrs. TORRES. We want you to succeed.

Secretary DUFFY. Thank you.

Mrs. TORRES. Thank you. I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. Great hearing this morning. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for being here. We look forward to your continued leadership and a partnership as we continue to achieve the shared goals that we all have. And that is for it to be the gold standard of a transportation network throughout, and your leadership will be vital to that end.

The lady to my left who keeps the clock and takes all the required notes and keeps me pointed in the right direction is Avery Pierson. She is typical of the professional staff members that you saw behind us here today, scattered throughout this room, and I am eternally grateful for them. They, as you know, Mr. Duffy, they are the unsung heroes of the Congress because they do such remarkable work and with no expectation of anything in return except, you know, a regular paycheck. So thank you, Avery, and to all of those who are behind me that do this great work.

Tim, Sherry, we are grateful you are here. You have honored us with your presence. Your loss is unimaginable, and we and the American public grieve with you. And again, we recommit ourselves to making sure that what happened never happens again. And your participation in this hearing this morning says a lot about you and your family and about your son. So thank you from the bottom of our hearts for being here today.

Mr. Clyburn, any closing remarks?

Mr. CLYBURN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I, too, wish to thank the Lilley family for being here today. On that particular day, I think it was six or seven people in both aircrafts lost their lives. One of whom—and I have heard from several of those families. One of whom was a young lady who was landing in Washington to accept a job, a new job as a law professor at Howard University. Her story I think about a lot.

Mr. Secretary, thank you so much for being here. As you know, I represent the entire peninsula of Charleston. When I came to Congress, the primary economy in South Carolina was driven by two T's, textiles and tobacco. Today, it is still driven by two T's, but now it is tourism and transportation. And I would hope that as we work together toward the future, that we would take into stock.

The Department of Transportation is very important to this country, very important to us in South Carolina, but it does not operate in a silo. It operates, hopefully, in conjunction with our trade representatives, with our Department of Commerce, because we are suffering in South Carolina. Just recently, Volvo just announced a layoff at that facility. It is the only Volvo facility in this country, but they are laying off because they can't get their parts they need from other countries because of tariffs. BMW, Mercedes-Benz. Mercedes-Benz makes all of their popular HBCUs, whatever they call them, in North Charleston, South Carolina, in my district. So this is very, very important for us to make sure the Department of Transportation is functioning in a way that would benefit the future of our great country and do so in such a way that we utilize all of our resources and our talent to make this country greater. Thank you, and I yield back.

Secretary DUFFY. Mr. Ranking Member, I would welcome your invitation to come to Charleston. We can even invite former chairman Trey Gowdy to join us as well. I look forward to it.

Mr. CLYBURN. Well, Trey is a good buddy. We don't agree on much politically. In fact, I guess I am as close to the governor of South Carolina as one could possibly be. And we don't agree on anything politically, but we are good friends because we believe in the future of South Carolina and all South Carolinians. I yield back.

Mr. WOMACK. And on that note, staff members are reminded that questions for the record should be submitted to subcommittee staff within 7 days. Thanks again to everybody for your participation in this hearing. This subcommittee stands adjourned.
[Whereupon, at 12:05 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

Sean Duffy, Secretary
**Budget Hearing – Fiscal Year 2026 Request for the Department of
 Transportation**

Chairman Steve Womack
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

Citizenship of U.S. Carriers

Question Background: DOT regulations (49 U.S.C. 40102 (a)) requires that air carriers operating within the United States must be organized under the laws of the United States and also requires that at least 75 percent of the voting interest is owned or controlled by persons that are citizens of the United States. There are concerning reports that the Biden Administration did not enforce the citizenship requirements with regard to helicopter operations and that some U.S. operators have written formal complaints to DOT.

Question: Will you assure us that the Department will carefully look into this issue and take proactive steps to ensure that citizenship and control regulations are appropriately enforced?

Answer:

The Department takes seriously its responsibility to ensure that U.S. air carriers remain fit, willing, and able to serve the public, including compliance with U.S. ownership and control requirements. We are currently conducting a comprehensive review of the citizenship of Heliservice USA, LLC f/k/a Scottsdale Helicopters I, LLC, an air taxi. We are carefully considering the facts and circumstances surrounding the relationship between the air carrier and any foreign entities involved in its ownership and control. A formal complaint has been filed. As this is an ongoing matter, the Department cannot comment on the merits. We are working expeditiously to complete our analysis and review.

Contract Towers

Question Background: I am a strong supporter of the FAA Contract Tower Program, which enhances aviation safety at smaller airports in around the country and in Arkansas, including at four airports in my district. Contract towers play a critical role in our National Airspace System, providing air traffic services at airports that would otherwise lack such service.

Question: I applaud your efforts to modernize our air traffic control system and supercharge the air traffic controller workforce. Will these efforts also boost controller staffing at contract towers or are there other efforts of the FAA to ensure contract towers are properly staffed as well? What efforts is the FAA taking to ensure these controllers have the proper technology to perform their jobs?

Answer:

The FAA's efforts to supercharge the air traffic controller workforce benefit controller hiring, including at contract towers. The Federal Contract Tower (FCT) Program is leading a training and integration strategy to bring graduates of Collegiate Training Programs directly into the FCT workforce, bolstering staffing levels and operational resilience.

Regarding technology, the FAA is working to ensure controllers have the necessary tools to perform their duties safely and effectively. For example, we are working on tailored requirements to allow

for the use of non-federally owned and operated Surface Awareness Initiative Displays (SAID) and Airborne Position Reference Tools (APRT) to provide controllers with better situational awareness. We have conducted a safety assessment, finalized minimum technical requirements, and solicited applications from vendors with products that meet our requirements with the intent of providing FCTs with a list of approved systems for purchase.

Airport Development

Question Background: Airports receiving federal grants are required to obtain different types of approvals from the FAA before they can move forward with their development projects. In the past, the FAA has taken an excessive amount of time to issue grants and necessary project approvals.

Question: As you work to cut federal red tape and make DOT and FAA more efficient, what actions will your department take to speed up the review process and avoid unnecessary delays, especially for safety-critical airport projects?

Answer:

The FAA has taken several actions to streamline the review process. We are expediting review of policies and procedures implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to streamline permit approvals and the environmental review process, as directed by the Council on Environmental Quality. These actions include implementation of section 783 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 which expands environmental streamlining to a broader range of airport projects. Further, the FAA is reviewing and aligning agency actions subject to NEPA review with the revised definition of Major Federal Actions from the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023.

We are also implementing section 788 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 which establishes new categorical exclusions for airport projects receiving limited Federal funding. In December 2024 we issued guidance instructing field offices to presume a project is covered by a categorical exclusion for the purpose of environmental review if it receives less than \$6 million of Federal funds or has a total estimated cost of not more than \$35 million and the total amount of Federal funding is less than 15 percent. We received feedback from the airport industry on the implementation of section 788 and are working to update our guidance in response. We anticipate revised guidance on this topic in the near future.

PNT/GPS Backup

Question Background: GPS is the primary global system to provide capabilities for civilian, government and military uses. Loss of GPS Timing signals would cause significant adverse impacts to cellular networks, the power grid, financial markets, the military, aviation, ground transportation, farming, and first responders, among others. Congress established a PNT technologies program in 2022 to allow for the wide adoption of multiple technologies that provide the necessary GPS backup and complementary PNT as identified in 2021 in the “Complementary PNT and GPS Backup Technologies Demonstration Report” (DOT-VNTSC- 20-07). Congress has appropriated \$38 million for PNT.

Question: Can you please provide an update on the implementation of the PNT program, including efforts at VOLPE including public-private partnership models?

Answer:

The Department is currently implementing the Rapid Phase of its [DOT Complementary PNT Action Plan](#). Last year, nine vendors were selected through a competitive, simplified acquisition process, and their technologies have now been tested under both normal and challenging conditions. The collected data is being analyzed, and a report on the results will be released soon. Additionally, to broaden the range of technologies, strengthen partnerships with critical infrastructure sectors, and utilize a variety of test site locations, a second Rapid Phase is underway. The DOT plans to make a new round of awards to complementary PNT technology vendors by mid-summer 2025.

In addition to expanding field trials and utilization of established PNT proving grounds with Complementary PNT (CPNT) technology vendors and critical infrastructure owners and operators, DOT is moving forward to implement a CPNT performance monitoring framework, and supporting the development of CPNT specifications and standards.

DOT is working to implement a Federal PNT Services Clearinghouse, as identified in the DOT Complementary PNT Action Plan. The Clearinghouse will catalog a schedule of Complementary PNT services to inform resilient PNT acquisition decisions for federal users and critical infrastructure owners and operators in support of Executive Order 13905 and Space Policy Directive-7. This work will drive adoption of CPNT technologies through government procurement strategy for purchasing PNT services using the PNT Contract Language Guideline developed in response to Executive Order 13905. The Guideline provides key actions for acquisitions personnel that leverage the NIST Foundational PNT Profile (NISTIR 8323) through the Cybersecurity Framework.

US Merchant Marine Academy Capital Improvement Plan

Question Background: Decades of underinvestment at the US Merchant Marine Academy in staffing and infrastructure have placed the Academy at risk of losing its accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. According to the 2021 Congressionally mandated National Academy of Public Administration report, the greatest risk to USMMA's future is doing nothing to significantly address the longstanding issues that put the safety and health of the midshipmen and the entire USMMA community in peril. Current estimates to execute a full-scale modernization of the campus over 10 years is \$1.02 billion, and the USMMA Alumni Association and Foundation is seeking \$161 million for the first installment in FY26.

Question: Can you please provide an assessment of your findings at the United States Merchant Marine Academy and an update on your plans to improve campus facilities?

Answer:

A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and USMMA co-led planning charette occurred in April 2025, and included a broad set of stakeholders, including Academy faculty, staff, midshipman leaders, representatives from the USMMA Alumni Association and National Parents Association. This planning exercise resulted in a long-range Campus Master Plan which has been approved by the U.S. Department of Transportation Secretary and is currently under review for concurrence with the White House and Office of Management and Budget.

Sean Duffy, Secretary
Budget Hearing – U.S. Department of Transportation
 Ranking Member Rosa L. DeLauro
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

Amtrak Reduction in Force

Question Background: Amtrak is of critical importance to our economy, particularly to my constituents and others who live along the Northeast Corridor and rely on this service to connect to school and jobs, including me. I regularly travel the Northeast Corridor (NEC), so I know that the NEC rail service is the lifeline of the \$6 trillion economic region spanning 12 states from Virginia to Maine.

Last week, Amtrak announced that it would be cutting about 450 jobs. More than 10 percent of those jobs were in “Safety and Security” positions, and another 20 percent were in Capital and Service Delivery positions.

It is my understanding that Amtrak views these cuts as necessary based on a “review of their management structure”. But I am very concerned that these personnel cuts will hamstring Amtrak’s ability to manage the historic investments that Congress funded to improve passenger rail through the Infrastructure and Investment in Jobs Act. This funding improves safety, creates good jobs, and will lay the foundation for historic rail improvement.

Question: Has DOT or the Federal Railroad Administration since consulted with Amtrak to determine how these decisions would impact their service delivery across its network? To what extent will Amtrak be able to manage its rail infrastructure and improve the safety of rail across America without the administrative staff to carry out these projects?

Answer:

DOT and FRA are committed to ensuring Amtrak delivers high quality service to its customers and completes projects on time and on budget. Amtrak management briefed its Board of Directors (including DOT) on the workforce reductions. Of the 450 positions eliminated, approximately 250 were active employees and 200 were open positions that had not yet been filled, representing a 10% management reduction. DOT is confident that Amtrak can achieve its mission and manage its rail infrastructure with these reductions by streamlining its organizational structure and by focusing on process improvements to drive efficiency.

Ongoing Federal Investments in Rail

Question Background: The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provided long overdue, historic funding for rail, but it will be important to maintain a consistent, long-term investment in both passenger and freight rail to meet growing demand and maintain safe, reliable service.

Funding needs to be stable and disbursed in a way that gives our respective state departments of transportation the ability to be timely, effective, and responsible stewards of federal funds. Disruptions in funding – intentional or otherwise – can lead to project delays and cost overruns, which benefit no one.

Garrett Eucallito, Connecticut's commissioner of transportation and the current president of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials provided testimony to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure last week that I hope you and your colleagues at USDOT have had the opportunity to review.

Question: Have you had an opportunity to see AASHTO's recommendations for rail programs?

Answer:

The Department monitors all congressional activity related to its areas of jurisdiction, including the May 6, 2025 House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure hearing on Improving the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Federal Rail Assistance at which Mr. Eucallito testified. AASHTO has also published recommendations for rail programs to its website and discussed them at its most recent conference in January.

Question: Can I get your commitment to reviewing this testimony and working with me and my staff on a longer-term conversation about the future of Federal Railroad Administration funding to ensure that we are setting our states up for success in meeting our long-term goals for American railroads?

Answer:

Yes, we look forward to working with you and your staff on how we can ensure the continued success of rail in the U.S. The FY 2026 President's Budget proposes increased funding for the Federal Railroad Administration's programs above the FY 2025 enacted level. This includes \$500 million for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program to meet the continued demand for the program and enhance passenger and freight rail systems across the country. The FY 2026 request for CRISI represents a 400-percent increase above the FY 2025 enacted level. Simultaneously, the Department is committed to ensuring accountability regarding the use of taxpayer dollars and continuing to streamline project delivery.

Hudson River Tunnel

Question Background: The Northeast Corridor Hudson River Tunnel Project is integral to speeding up train times from Florida to D.C., especially along the Northeast Corridor from DC to Boston. The project is of critical importance to our economy, particularly to my constituents and others who live along the Northeast Corridor and rely on this service to connect to school and jobs, including me. The NEC rail service is the lifeline of the \$6 trillion economic region spanning 12 states from Virginia to Maine.

Question: Please provide an update on what DOT has done to move this project forward and provide any budgetary concerns or needs with respect to the project.

Answer:

The Hudson Tunnel Project is a two-track, 6.5-mile Commuter Rail and Intercity Rail project to provide long-term reliability to the regional and national rail network. The project includes three elements: (1) the construction of a new Hudson River Tunnel between New York and New Jersey; (2) the rehabilitation of the existing North River Tunnel under the Hudson River; and (3) utility relocation work to support the separately funded Hudson Yards Concrete Casing Section 3 Project.

The Gateway Development Commission (GDC) is the project sponsor, and it is advancing the project with support from partners including Amtrak, New Jersey Transit, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the States of New York and New Jersey. The total project cost is \$16.041

billion, and the project has received just over \$7 billion in FTA grants, \$3.8 billion in FRA grants, and more than \$4.3 billion in Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing loans.

GDC is delivering the project through a series of contract packages. Several major contracts are currently under construction and two additional construction contracts will be awarded later this year. FTA, FRA, and the Build America Bureau meet regularly with GDC to provide technical support and oversight regarding cost, schedule, and scope. The agencies work together to identify project-related issues, develop solutions, and move the project expeditiously. There are no budgetary concerns or needs with respect to the Project that need to be addressed at this time.

Sean Duffy, Secretary
Budget Hearing – U.S. Department of Transportation
 Rep. Pete Aguilar
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

California High Speed Rail

Question Background:

The United States is behind other countries in implementing high-speed rail systems. In an effort to compete globally, California is in the process of building two high-speed rail systems: Brightline West and the California High-Speed Rail Project.

In February, you announced your review of about \$4 billion in federal funding obligated to the California High-Speed Rail project. Last week, President Trump said that the California High-Speed Rail project will not receive any more federal funding.

I'm aware that the California High-Speed Rail Authority has sent you over 80,000 pages of documents to comply with your review of the project.

Question 1: Will you commit to working with the California High-Speed Rail Authority to remedy any issues that the Administration has with the project, so that we can bring high-speed rail to the United States?

Answer:

On June 4, 2025, the Department announced its decision to propose the termination of two grants to the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) (FR-HSR-0118-12 and 69A36524521070FSPCA). This determination is based on default events outlined in FRA's June 4 letter to CHSRA (available [here](#)) and supported by the 310-page report attached to the letter, which describes nine key findings, including that CHSRA has at least a \$7 billion funding gap to complete the Early Operating Segment (EOS), with no credible plan to secure additional funds and that CHSRA has overrepresented its ridership projections for the EOS substantially. FRA has provided CHSRA notice and an opportunity to respond to the proposed termination, consistent with the terms of its grant agreements. CHSRA has 30 days from receipt of the letter to dispute the event of default or propose corrective action. FRA will consider CHSRA's response, including any proposed corrective action. If, however, FRA makes a final determination to terminate the grant agreements, FRA will reprogram awarded but unspent Federal funds from the terminated awards to other purposes. Delivering high-speed rail to the United States in an efficient and cost-effective way remains a high priority to the Department.

Question 2: California remains committed to bringing more high-speed rail projects to the United States. Will you work with the California delegation to secure federal funding for these innovative projects?

Answer:

DOT and FRA have several competitive grant programs under which high-speed rail projects may be eligible for federal funding. We welcome all eligible project sponsors to apply for this funding, and

we remain committed to working on innovative high-speed rail projects that can be delivered in an efficient, cost-effective manner. This includes bringing the first true 186+ miles per hour high-speed rail service to the United States with the Brightline West public-private partnership that will connect Las Vegas, NV to Rancho Cucamonga, CA. FRA is administering a \$3 billion grant with the Nevada Department of Transportation to deliver the Brightline West project.

Sean Duffy, Secretary
Budget Hearing – U.S. Department of Transportation
 Rep. Bonnie Watson Coleman
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

ATC Equipment Outages

Question Background:

Considering the equipment failure that has impacted Newark Liberty International Airport, it has become clear that we need to ensure the American public that air travel remains the safest form of transportation available. To do this, we need to make sure there are redundancies in our systems so that if an issue occurs, a backup will prevent the worst from happening.

Question:

Mr. Secretary, we've heard a lot about equipment outages and staffing shortages plaguing our air traffic control system. Can you explain what redundancies and backups the FAA has in place to ensure that air travel remains safe despite these challenges? Can you reassure the American public that flying remains the safest mode of transport?

Answer:

FAA equipment and procedures have multiple layers of redundancy to ensure the safety of the flying public. The airspace around Newark Liberty International Airport is now controlled by the Philadelphia Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACON) facility. Like all similar air traffic control centers in the U.S., Philadelphia TRACON relies on a resilient communication system to safely manage air traffic. Voice, radar, and other data are carried over two physically separate, redundant paths to increase availability and reliability of these services. There are also multiple radio frequencies available to provide controllers alternative options in the event one radio fails.

In addition, there are three separate emergency radio facilities in the Newark area. Recently, the FAA made the system even more resilient by connecting these emergency radios to Philadelphia by satellite. Controllers can also use alternative communication tools, including hand-held radios, to continue communicating with pilots.

Similarly, radar data has multiple paths to reach controllers; they can switch between two full capability radar systems and a third, backup view that uses local radar.

If there is a serious issue, controllers have backup plans to pass air traffic to nearby control centers. While the loss of redundancy can result in a reduction in efficiency, these layers of backup ensure the FAA continues to operate the safest airspace in the world.

National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Program

Question Background:

On February 6th, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) sent a letter to state DOTs freezing the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) program -- an unprecedented move

for a formula funding program that was passed with bipartisan support. In addition to halting state progress, FHWA stated in the letter that it was rescinding existing guidance and working to develop new guidance.

It has now been 103 days since that letter was issued, and no progress has been made. This prolonged freeze has left many states in limbo and has introduced significant uncertainty for awardees that could lead to stranded assets without near term resolution. Over \$3.5 billion promised funding is currently being withheld, prompting a group of 16 states, including New Jersey, to sue the federal government in an effort to unfreeze the money. This delay is unacceptable.

Question:

- What is causing the delay? Can you provide a detailed update on the FHWA's progress in developing new guidance, including whether or not this will be final guidance, and can you commit to publishing final guidance by the end of the month?
- Can you provide details on whether you intend to review the minimum standards?
- Furthermore, can you commit to allowing states to obligate funding while they await the release of new, finalized guidance?

Answer:

On February 6, 2025, FHWA rescinded the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) Formula Program guidance dated June 11, 2024, as well as prior versions of the guidance. As a result of the rescission of the NEVI Formula Program Guidance, FHWA also suspended the approval of all State Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Deployment plans for all fiscal years. No new obligations may occur under the NEVI Formula Program until the updated final NEVI Formula Program guidance is issued, and the new State plans are submitted and approved. FHWA, however, is still processing reimbursements for current obligations under the NEVI Formula Program.

In the three and a half years since the enactment of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, approximately 84 percent of the NEVI Formula Program funds remain unobligated. The vast majority of State departments of transportation are not fully utilizing the funding for this program. This lack of obligation is a clear indicator that the program needs reform. FHWA is updating the NEVI Formula Program guidance to address the underutilization of the funding and to align with current U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) policy and priorities.

FHWA aims to have updated draft NEVI Formula guidance published for public comment in spring 2025 and will publish updated final NEVI Formula Program Guidance that responds to the comments received. Instructions for the submission of new State plans for all fiscal years will be included in the updated guidance. FHWA is also considering undertaking a rulemaking to reduce the regulatory burden imposed by the NEVI standards and requirements. The Department notes that the Fiscal Year 2026 President's Budget proposes cancelling \$5.7 billion in Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act funding provided to the Department of Transportation for failed electric vehicle charger grant programs.

Sean Duffy, Secretary
Budget Hearing – U.S. Department of Transportation
 Representative Dale W. Strong
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

Question Subject Area:

Question Background:

Vulcan Materials Company is the nation's largest producer of construction aggregates — primarily crushed stone, sand, and gravel — and a major producer of aggregates-based construction materials, including asphalt and ready mixed concrete.

To distribute those materials, Vulcan built the only deep-water port on the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico and, over decades, also invested in a U.S. distribution network. On May 5, 2022, the Mexican government illegally shut down Vulcan's operations. President López Obrador decreed the property a Naturally Protected Area (NPA) on September 23, 2024, precluding Vulcan from using its property for productive purposes. In early October, President Sheinbaum said she planned to finalize the management plan for the NPA by the end of February 2025 – without any input from Vulcan.

Last week, Mexico's Attorney General asked the court to issue a warrant purportedly to allow Mexican authorities to forcibly enter El Corchalito — once again — to measure the quarrying area for the third time. The Attorney General also stated that it plans to "locate and seize" Vulcan's machinery and equipment purportedly used in the alleged crime even though there have been no operations in any of Vulcan's lots for over four years as a result of Mexico's unlawful closure of those operations.

Question:

Secretary Duffy – I would like to bring to your attention to an ongoing matter that impacts both my district and the entire state of Alabama. The Mexican government has shut down and expropriated the land and quarry of an Alabama company that is a major provider of construction materials to critical infrastructure projects in the U.S.

My colleagues across Congress and the Trump administration have been working to resolve this ongoing issue, and I look forward to engaging further with your office on the matter. If Mexico tries to remove this company from its lawfully held land, can you commit to working with me and this committee to ensure no entity or company involved in these actions would be able to benefit from stealing the land and port of a US company?

Answer:

The Department is aware of and concerned by Mexican authorities' treatment of Vulcan Materials Company. We are working with our interagency partners to help achieve a positive resolution of the outcome that recognizes the rights of U.S. companies and Mexico's international obligations.

Sean Duffy, Secretary
Budget Hearing – U.S. Department of Transportation
 Rep. Ryan Zinke (MT-01)
 Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies
 House Committee on Appropriations

Tariffs Impact on Aviation

Question Background:

Mr. Secretary, As you know, aerospace is the last manufacturing sector in the U.S. where America exports more than it imports – resulting in a \$72 billion positive balance of trade last year.

Aviation is a model of what President Trump is working to achieve for other industries. Over 80 percent of a commercial airplane is made from American suppliers and workers, but with 80 percent of sales abroad to airlines in other countries. Additionally, most aerospace suppliers in the U.S. are small businesses with less than 50 employees.

However, the threat of reciprocal tariffs in Europe and China in particular may put airplane deliveries to foreign customers at risk. Despite announcing big sales, 80 percent of payment is received when by U.S. manufacturers when an airplane is delivered – not when the sale is announced.

Question:

The President's announcement of the \$10 billion in U.S. airplane exports in the US-UK Trade Agreement last week was a welcome and encouraging step and today's announcement in Saudi Arabia built upon that. What more can be done to ensure that airline customers in Europe, Middle East and Asia accept delivery of U.S. aircraft this year despite threats of reciprocal tariffs?

Answer:

U.S. manufactured aircraft, aircraft engines, and aerospace parts and equipment continue to be considered the products of choice globally due to their technology and high-caliber safety features available. The Department has consistently heard from our trading partners of their strong interest in purchasing U.S. aircraft, though they have also raised concerns about delays in taking delivery, a message we have shared in turn with U.S. industry. As our manufacturers increase their output, while following the safety directives put in place by the FAA, we believe that foreign airline customers will welcome delivery of U.S. aircraft.

The Administration is engaging trade partners on the issue of reciprocal trade, and the Department is part of that effort. We work closely with interagency partners to address barriers to U.S. aviation exports, which can play an important role in ensuring balanced trade.

Question:

Mr. Secretary, it's no secret that the FAA has fallen behind other international aviation authorities in the speed it reviews and certifies U.S. aircraft, both due to personnel and process challenges. With UAS and EVTOL aircraft readying certification, including a significant number of U.S. aircraft and engines pending certification, what steps can this Administration take to improve the speed at which aircraft and aerospace parts are certified, while fully abiding by certification safety laws and regulations?

Question:

How does the speed of FAA certification compare to Europe and Canada? Are there processes or technologies they have adopted that allow them to certify aerospace systems at a faster or more predictable rate, without compromising safety standards?

Answer:

The FAA is working diligently with industry stakeholders to ensure that safe, certified products and new technologies enter the market as soon as possible. This means engaging with new entrants such as Electronic Vertical Take-Off and Landing (eVTOL) companies early-on to establish airworthiness criteria for their innovative designs and setting clear expectations in the certification program. Implementation of the pilot program described in section 6 of the recent Executive Order "Unleashing American Drone Dominance" (June 6, 2025) will assist with these efforts.

The FAA has made landmark developments in the certification of eVTOLs and to accommodate wide-scale Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) operations. On October 22, 2024, the FAA issued its final rule, "Integration of Powered-Lift: Pilot Certification and Operations," for the qualifications and training that instructors and pilots must have to fly aircraft in the powered-lift category. This much-anticipated Special Federal Aviation Regulation also addresses the operational requirements of powered-lift aircraft, including minimum safe altitudes and required visibility, providing a clear pathway for operations. In addition, the FAA is finalizing Aircraft Certification 21.17-4, Type Certification of Powered-lift. This will pave the way for follow on eVTOL and Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) projects in providing expected requirements upfront.

The FAA is also working to implement both the MOSAIC (Modernization of Special Airworthiness Certification) and Normalizing UAS Beyond Visual Line of Sight (BVLOS) Operations rulemakings to provide an alternative approach to getting aircraft acceptance using industry standards in lieu of the more rigorous process of full type certification and standard airworthiness approvals. This will significantly improve approval/acceptance timelines and reduce the amount of FAA resources needed to review and accept declarations of compliance made by the applicants to indicate their design meets FAA-accepted industry standards. The MOSAIC rule is expected to be published as a final rule in 2025. The notice of proposed rulemaking for the Part 108 BVLOS rule, is expected to be published in 2025, in accordance with the Section 4 of the June 6 Executive Order.

Flight Safety**Question Background:**

It would be really helpful if Members could get witnesses on the record reaffirming that it is safe to fly. Sec Duffy has been emphatic on this point in recent days and I am sure his comments will reflect that.

Question:

Mr. Secretary, we've heard a lot about equipment outages and staffing shortages plaguing our air traffic control system. Can you explain what redundancies and backups the FAA has in place to ensure that air travel remains safe despite these challenges? Can you reassure the American public that flying remains the safest mode of transport?

Answer:

Air traffic control facilities in the United States rely on resilient communication systems to safely manage air traffic. These systems carry voice, radar, and other data over two physically separate, redundant paths to increase availability and reliability of these services. There are also multiple radio frequencies available to give controllers alternative options in the event one radio fails.

In addition, critical communications facilities are backed up by separate emergency radio facilities in the event of multiple equipment failures. They can also use alternative communication tools, including hand-held radios, to continue communicating with pilots.

Similarly, radar data has multiple paths to reach controllers; they can switch between two full capability radar systems and a third, backup view that uses local radar.

If there is a serious issue such as a facility-wide outage of automation systems, controllers have backup plans to pass air traffic to nearby control centers. Additionally, we have technicians trained to respond to equipment failures, and engineers who are on call 24/7/365 to restore systems to service when an outage occurs.

Nothing is more important than ensuring the safety of the National Airspace System (NAS). Our aging infrastructure is becoming more susceptible to outages and is becoming more challenging for our technicians to maintain, which is why I am aggressively advocating for a new air traffic control system. While we work to build a new, state-of-the-art air traffic control system, our dedicated workforce, as well as the multiple layers of safety and redundancy built into the NAS, will continue to ensure flying in the United States remains the safest mode of transport.

Question Background:

Montana has airspace around growing cities that are experiencing a diverse aircraft fleet mix of commercial airlines, military, firefighting, and other aircraft. Some of these congested airspaces lack radar coverage as a result of surrounding high mountainous terrain.

Question:

What measures will Congress take to improve radar and surveillance infrastructure in mountainous regions where gaps in coverage pose a risk to aviation safety and limit air traffic control effectiveness?

Answer:

The FAA ensures safety in all U.S. airspace, including mountainous regions, through a combination of procedures, services, and equipment. We continuously evaluate enplanements and total operations, as well as analyze aircraft traffic patterns and airspace to ensure that the provided procedures, services, and equipment are appropriate for the level of activity in the airspace. As part of this review, the FAA considers providing additional surveillance capabilities in all regions, including mountainous ones.

Question Background:

I am concerned not only about the spate of recent accidents involving aircraft but also by the number of “near misses.” While the focus on buying new, upgraded and modern technology is admirable and necessary, the fact remains that most mishaps are traced back to human error. Rigorous training and adequate staffing will make a big difference, but you must employ AI-based technology that not only makes the human-in-the-loop better, but also compensates for that human’s inherent weaknesses and the system’s structural biases.

Question:

Who on your team is the point person for the development, procurement or acquisition of technology designed to identify, manage, and mitigate “human-in-the-loop” errors, which are a primary causal factor in most aviation-related mishaps?

Answer:

FAA’s Mission Support Services conducts operational needs assessments to identify requirements for systems to enhance safety and mitigate errors. FAA’s Program Management Organization ensures the procurement and acquisition of technology is aligned to address those identified requirements. For example, FAA automation systems have requirements, using safety logic, to provide alerts to air traffic controllers for potential conflicts, including as a result of human or equipment error, between aircraft, or aircraft and terrain. Recently, leveraging this process allowed the FAA to rapidly procure and implement the Surface Awareness Initiative (SAI) to provide surface situational awareness to air traffic controllers. This cost-effective technology provides controllers with timely and accurate depictions of aircraft and vehicles on the entire airfield in all weather conditions.

Question Background:

I sense that there is developing a preference for one big fix to the system, a single, comprehensive solution. Given the two-decades experience with NextGen, that is troubling.

Question:

Who on your team is in charge of evaluating, acquiring and deploying existing Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS) software solutions that enhance safety now and help the human-in-the-loop do

what they do best – make good decisions – solutions that can be layered in to the current system while you take the time it will take to build a new system?

Answer:

The FAA's Program Management Organization is responsible for managing the strategy, resource allocation, and coordination involved in evaluating, acquiring, and integrating Commercial Off the Shelf (COTS) software solutions. Prime vendors supply and customize these solutions to ensure they meet operational needs and are compatible with existing systems. FAA Engineering teams conduct technical evaluations, testing, and integration to seamlessly incorporate these solutions into the current infrastructure. Together, these teams are able to deploy solutions that enhance safety and efficiency, empowering human operators to make better decisions.

One example is the FAA's recently deployed SAI, which utilizes COTS software solutions that expand surface situational awareness at airports without existing surface surveillance capabilities. SAI is a vendor-managed and sustained product that utilizes Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) to display airport surface traffic to controllers in towers. It is currently operational at 18 airports with 32 additional sites planned to be operational by December 31, 2025.

Question:

Do you currently have an audit system to evaluate pilot experience when upgrading licenses that have hours requirements? For example, when a pilot claims to have 1500 hours, the hours threshold for obtaining an Airline Transport Pilots License, do you have any technology and data drive validation system to check pilot logbooks when upgrading these licenses?

Answer:

Pilot logbooks are self-reported documents. The FAA relies on the applicant's honesty and accuracy in reporting flight hours. As such, the FAA does not have a comprehensive, automated audit system or technology-driven validation system that cross-checks every pilot's logged flight hours against independent data sources. The FAA may perform checks if there is suspicion or reason to doubt reported hours. If requested, employers of pilots with Air Transport Pilot Certificates may provide flight hour verification letters or documentation that supports the hours claimed. If the FAA finds noncompliance or falsification of records, the consequences for the pilot can be severe—including certificate revocation.

Question:

When a pilot is involved in a mishap, do you have the ability to validate currency, experience, and the performance track record or do you take the log book at face value?

Answer:

The FAA has multiple ways to validate a pilot's currency, experience, and performance. The pilot logbook (whether paper or electronic) is the most accurate means to validate currency and experience, provided it is kept current and up-to-date by the pilot. The FAA reviews them during

interactions with pilots such as surveillance (e.g., ramp checks) or during document reviews for practical tests. Additional FAA pilot records are maintained with a pilot's certifications and ratings; enforcement actions or violations; and flight reviews (if reported). The FAA may also contact pilot schools or employers for corroborating records. There are systems to help determine a pilot's performance track record (e.g., Pilot Records Database); however, not all experience is required to be logged in that system. FAA verifies and cross-checks pilot currency, experience, and performance with multiple sources and does not rely on the pilot's logbook alone during an accident or incident investigation.

Question:

Do you have any systems that operate in near real time that determine if a pilot filing a flight plan has a valid medical and pilots license? If so, please explain that system and how you are able to ensure that pilots are not flying with expired medical certificates and licenses.

Answer:

Flight plans do not require pilot certificate or medical certificate status. All pilots are required to comply with the Code of Federal Regulations. The FAA may check compliance with these requirements during interactions with pilots, such as surveillance (e.g., ramp checks) or during document reviews for practical tests.

Question:

Additionally, how do you ensure that pilots are maintaining FAA mandated currency requirements for landing, instrument flight time, instrument approach types, and mandatory flight reviews?

Answer:

The pilot logbook (whether paper or electronic) is the most accurate means to validate these requirements, provided it is kept current and up-to-date by the pilot. The FAA may check compliance with these requirements during interactions with pilots, such as surveillance (e.g., ramp checks) or during document reviews for practical tests. The FAA may also contact pilot schools or employers for supporting documents and records.

Question:

What systems are in place to validate that a pilot is flying with the appropriate type rating when they file a flight plan? Who is responsible for validating that information prior to a flight?

Answer:

Flight plans do not require pilot certificate. All pilots are required to comply with the Code of Federal Regulations. The FAA may check compliance with these requirements during interactions with pilots, such as surveillance (e.g., ramp checks) or during document reviews for practical tests.

Question:

If a pilot is charged with a DUI, drug conviction, or felony, do you have any process or technology that ensures that a flight plan will not be approved? Is it the pilot's responsibility to self-report?

Answer:

No, information regarding a pilot charged with a DUI, drug conviction, or felony is not required on a flight plan. Under [14 CFR 61.15](#) (Offenses involving alcohol or drugs), pilots must report any alcohol or drug-related convictions or administrative actions to the FAA within 60 calendar days, but not on a specific flight plan.

Question:

Outside of a direct supervisor, when there is one present, do you have any technology to evaluate the communication performance of an air traffic controller with regard to procedural compliance? Is there a system to provide a track record of performance over time?

Answer:

Yes, the Air Traffic Organization employs a structured and comprehensive system to evaluate air traffic controller communication and procedural compliance, even in the absence of direct supervisory observation. This framework is governed by FAA Order 3400.20, *Individual Performance Management for Operational Personnel*, which outlines the processes for evaluating controller performance. To assess communication and procedural adherence, the FAA uses quality control processes that include live and recorded monitoring of voice communications, radar data analysis, and direct observation. Performance is tracked over time using written documentation such as operations oversight reviews and proficiency checks. These records are used for feedback and accountability.

The FAA also uses systems such as Voice Communication Systems to capture and replay communications for review. Additionally, analytical platforms like the Comprehensive Electronic Data Analysis and Reporting system are used to identify trends and inform performance reviews. These technologies support accurate assessments of procedural compliance and decision-making.

Question:

Outside of a direct supervisor, when there is one present, do you have any technology to evaluate the communication performance of a pilot with regard to procedural compliance? Is there a system to provide a track record of performance over time?

Answer:

The FAA has minimum qualifications and certificate-level expectations of performance for every FAA-certificated pilot. When the FAA learns of a pilot's noncompliance with regulations, including deviations from air traffic controller instructions, the FAA has several databases that are used to track that activity. With respect to pilot communication with air traffic controllers, the FAA has databases and tools that track pilot deviations that are tied to an airman record, which provide an indicator of pilot performance.

Question:

Do you have a system to evaluate performance of air traffic control performance in aggregate? For example, how does Los Angeles Tower compare to Reagan Tower with regards to communication clarity, consistency, and compliance with standard communication compliance?

Answer:

The FAA uses several mechanisms to support comparative analysis at the facility level. Under FAA Order 3400.20, *Individual Performance Management for Operational Personnel*, performance data is gathered locally through operations oversight reviews, on-the-spot corrections, and proficiency checks. While primarily designed to support individual and team performance, these tools also provide insight into facility-level trends over time. In addition, operational skills assessments, external compliance verification, runway incursion rates, and quality assurance programs within the Air Traffic Organization conduct systematic reviews of operational data, including voice communications and radar tracks, to assess adherence to standard procedures and phraseology.

Question:

What technology is being used to map communications of hazardous conditions between pilots and air traffic controllers? Are air traffic controllers taking hand written notes and passing that information along to pilots over the radio or is there a technology being used to streamline this process?

Answer:

The FAA is working to launch an Enterprise Information Display System (E-IDS) to provide controllers with a single display for quick reference information necessary to safely manage aircraft. E-IDS will replace multiple existing information displays—some that still use older technology such as floppy disks—into one easy-to-use platform with a common look and feel that will enable consistency across facilities.

The E-IDS solution will implement a centralized, cloud-ready architecture while also leveraging current FAA investments in enterprise infrastructure and services. The benefits include secure, timely display and correlation of relevant operational information from authoritative data sources via System Wide Information Management (SWIM)-based information services, such as Notices to Airmen (NOTAMs), special activity airspace (SAA) schedules, status, and weather information.

Additionally, the E-IDS solution includes capabilities for standardized entry and dissemination of pilot reports (PIREP), real-time observations of conditions that could be deemed hazardous, allowing dissemination by air traffic controllers to other operators flying in close proximity. This process is currently dependent on air traffic controllers entering paper records both in the PIREP system and then into the En Route Information Display System (ERIDS). The supervisor then enters the same information into the Aeronautical Information System Replacement (AISR) which provides the information to other facilities.

Question:

Why are ASRS reports able to be filled out and submitted by members of the public who do not currently hold a FAA pilots license? Why is there not a validation process to authenticate the credentials of that individual filling out that report? We know that ASRS reports are anonymous, but why are we not able to authenticate credentials prior to said individual completing the report before it become anonymous?

Answer:

The Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS), managed by NASA, allows submissions from anyone involved in aviation, not just FAA-licensed pilots, to capture valuable safety insights from a diverse group of industry stakeholders (e.g., air traffic controllers, mechanics, flight attendants, ground crew, or even passengers). Requiring credential validation before submission could create a barrier that discourages reporting and reduces the volume of safety data collected, undermining ASRS's purpose. Anonymity encourages open reporting without fear of reprisal, and pre-submission authentication risks creating traceable links to reporters' identities. ASRS filters out unreliable reports through post-submission analysis, where analysts assess narratives for consistency and relevance. Restricting submissions to only FAA-licensed pilots would exclude valuable perspectives from other stakeholders who witness or experience safety events.

Question:

Why are ASRS reports not integrated with positional data and weather reports to ensure accuracy?

Answer:

ASRS prioritizes reporter confidentiality to encourage voluntary safety incident reporting without fear of reprisal. Positional data and detailed weather information are often avoided to prevent specific times and locations from being used to expose the identity of reporters. Many ASRS reports include submitter-provided positional and weather details, but NASA's de-identification process generalizes or removes data like specific locations, dates, or times to protect anonymity while retaining relevant weather context. The FAA and aviation community are exploring technologies to enhance data utility without compromising confidentiality. Initiatives like the Aviation Safety Information Analysis and Sharing (ASIAS) program aim to correlate ASRS data with external sources in a privacy-preserving way. These efforts, alongside increased reporting encouragement, seek to improve systemic risk identification while maintaining trust in the ASRS.

Question:

What technology is in place to identify the riskiest pilots and operators such that early intervention happens prior to a mishap occurring?

Answer:

Voluntary safety reporting and proactive safety programs work together to support a data-driven approach to help pilots and operators identify risks or risky behavior before it becomes a safety event or an accident. These systems also support systemic issue identification, aid in trend analysis, and are used by the aviation community and the FAA in developing targeted mitigations against systemic risks.

Flight Operations Quality Assurance (FOQA) and Flight Data Monitoring (FDM) are key programs that collect and aggregate digital flight data, analyze that data, and identify risks and accident precursors to help a pilot or operator mitigate those issues before an accident or incident occurs. Aviation Safety Action Program (ASAP) and Aviation Safety Reporting System (ASRS) are programs that provide non-punitive avenues for pilots and operators to report safety concerns and errors without fear of punishment/enforcement.

There are also related programs in FAA's Flight Standards organization, such as the Compliance Program/Risk-Based Oversight (RBO). This program uses data to prioritize FAA oversight based on risk, focusing resources on the operators and individuals most likely to pose safety concerns. Early intervention capabilities include Safety Assurance System (SAS) assessments and data profiles to tailor surveillance. Another program is the Safety Management System (SMS), which provides a structured approach to managing safety risks through reporting, risk assessment, and continuous improvement. SMS encourages internal identification and mitigation of hazards before they lead to incidents.

US Merchant Marine Academy

Question Background:

Service obligated graduates of USMMA bring critical capabilities to U.S.-flagged commercial vessels, the Military Sealift Command, and as active duty and reserve officers in the Armed Forces. As one of our nation's five federal service academies, 100% of USMMA graduates have a federal service obligation. However, decades of underinvestment in staffing and infrastructure have placed the Academy at risk of losing its accreditation by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. According to the 2021 Congressionally mandated National Academy of Public Administration report, the greatest risk to USMMA's future is doing nothing to significantly address the longstanding issues that put the safety and health of the midshipmen and the entire USMMA community in peril. Current estimates to execute a full-scale modernization of the campus over 10 years is \$1.02 billion, and the USMMA Alumni Association and Foundation is seeking \$161 million for the first installment in FY26.

Question:

As a former Navy seal, I know the importance of the merchant marine for the sustainment of our troops deployed overseas. As Secretary of Transportation, you have the honor of leading and training the next generation of merchant mariners at the United States Merchant Marine Academy. Despite investment by this Subcommittee, the previous Administration failed to execute on critical modernization projects placing cadets in unacceptable academic and living conditions. When can we expect to see major modernization projects moving and will your full budget request include additional funding for capital improvements?

Answer:

On April 9, 2025, President Trump signed the Executive Order (EO) *Restoring America's Maritime Dominance*. Section 14 of EO directs the Secretary of Transportation to take immediate action to finalize a long-term master facilities plan (LMFP) and submit the plan to OMB for clearance. In alignment with our execution of the Executive Order, the USMMA and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) co-led a planning charette in April 2025. During this event, the USMMA and USACE collaborated to draft the LMFP, which is now under review for approval by the White House and the Office of Management and Budget.

Essential Air Services/Rural Airports**Question Background:**

I understand why there has been a focus on airports in large metropolitan areas such as Newark. Given you are from rural Wisconsin, I would like to hear more about your plans for updating and improving rural airports.

Question:

What is DOT doing to get rural airports up to speed?

Answer:

The FAA's Office of Airports works continuously with nearly 3,000 airports nationwide to ensure that they not only remain up to speed but also keep up with the pace of increasing and changing operations and improving safety standards. The FAA has teams of airport professionals in local Airport District Offices (ADOs) across the nation. The ADOs work closely with the States and airport sponsors to ensure that small and rural airports get direct support to pursue high-priority improvement projects. In addition, the ADOs participate in State aviation workshops to provide updates on the latest safety and financial programs.

Smaller and rural airports need certainty with funding options. The FAA provides this through its management of the Small Airport Fund, as well as opportunities to go to grant as soon as possible, each grant year. We look forward to working with Congress for the remainder of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization to deliver improvement grants as soon as possible upon each year's appropriation.

AM Radio**Question Background:**

As you know, AM radio is a critical tool in several events that FEMA responds to in the lead up to wildfires among other disasters.

Question:

Do you agree that it is important to maintain AM radio as a safety feature in vehicles?

Answer:

We acknowledge that communications across multiple transmission media represent a critical tool in responding to emergency situations. NHTSA currently does not have the authority to mandate AM radios in motor vehicles. We are aware of ongoing Congressional interest and will work with Congress on any legislation they propose, if requested.

Protecting Aircraft Owners Private Information**Question Background:**

As required by the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (Public Law 118-63), the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) implemented Section 803 Data Privacy, that allows private aircraft owners to request to keep certain ownership information, like their name and address, private and not publicly available on FAA websites. This will have a negative impact to a variety of aviation activities including state aircraft registration fee collections, airport fee collections, FBO fee collections, and aircraft emergency search operations.

Question: Given that Section 803 of the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act restricts access to aircraft ownership information, what legislative or regulatory remedies will Congress pursue to balance privacy concerns with the operational and financial needs of state aviation agencies, airports, and FBOs that rely on this data to assess and collect lawful fees?

Answer:

As noted, the FAA implemented the congressionally directed statutory requirement in section 803 of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. The FAA is developing a process to share data covered by section 803 with external stakeholders who have a bona fide business need for such information.

FAA staffing cuts

Question Background:

The President has directed the FAA to take steps to reduce staffing of non-essential positions. This directive has resulted in numerous departures from key positions within the Helena ADO. Possible question: “Reduced staffing of employees classified as “non-essential” is impacting Airport District Office operations that focus on safety regulations, airport infrastructure projects, and communications with local airports.

Question:

What steps will Congress take to ensure that FAA Airport District Offices are adequately staffed to maintain safety oversight, manage critical infrastructure projects, and support airport operations, given the proposed personnel reductions in the FY 2026 budget?”

Answer:

The FAA has not proposed any personnel reductions for the Office of Airports in the FY 2026 budget. We will continue to monitor onboard staffing levels closely, in light of recently offered early retirement and resignation incentives, to ensure all safety-critical and other federally funded projects are adequately staffed.

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