

**FLYING ON EMPTY: HOW SHUTDOWNS THREATEN  
AIR SAFETY, TRAVEL, AND THE ECONOMY**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, SPACE, AND  
INNOVATION

OF THE

COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE,  
SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

NOVEMBER 19, 2025

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SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION

ONE HUNDRED NINETEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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# **FLYING ON EMPTY: HOW SHUTDOWNS THREATEN AIR SAFETY, TRAVEL, AND THE ECONOMY**

**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2025**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, SPACE, AND INNOVATION,  
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:36 p.m., in room SR-253, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Jerry Moran, Chairman of the Subcommittee, presiding.

Present: Senators Moran [presiding], Sheehy, Capito, Duckworth, Cantwell, and Kim.

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JERRY MORAN, U.S. SENATOR FROM KANSAS**

Senator MORAN. I'll wait a few minutes to call the meeting to order, and we're waiting on, particularly, Senator Duckworth, and there's a vote going on in the House. I've cast my vote, and I assume that's what she's doing now, but we'll begin shortly.

[Pause.]

Senator MORAN. The Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation will come to order. I'm pleased to be here, and I thank our witnesses for joining us this afternoon for what I hope is a valuable discussion and expect to be a valuable discussion.

We convened this hearing because of the importance of the aviation and travel industry, a vital component of our Nation's economy, and trying to find ways to make certain that that industry is stable, including in difficult times like a government shutdown. That stability is severely inhibited by the critical functions that the Federal Aviation Administration, when they're suspended or when they're interrupted and when Congress fails to act, the FAA and the aviation industry suffer. I'm pleased that the cancellations and delays plaguing our flights, airlines, and airports are easing. One of the witnesses and I were on a flight that was delayed but only for mechanical reasons this week, which has been different than it was previously. Our air traffic controllers are reporting to work, and other essential activities at the FAA are back underway.

Thanksgiving, however, is just a few days away, and while we anticipate the airlines will be fully or nearly fully recovered, come next week, lingering strain and fatigue on the system perhaps is to be expected. Roughly 31 million passengers are expected to fly next week for the holiday, but there may be lingering impacts on

the system because of the shutdown. I look forward to the former Governor, Governor Sununu, speaking to us this afternoon, hopefully providing us with a roadmap as to what Americans flying next week will expect from the airlines. Last week, the U.S. Travel Association noted that more than \$6 billion were lost in travel spending because of the inability to fly, and we cannot afford them. Sure, the airlines and others, the people who work in the airports and in aviation, cannot further afford the instability and chaos. Our recent inaction in Washington has undoubtedly deterred young people from pursuing careers as air traffic controllers or other aviation professionals, a workforce we must prioritize.

I hope that consideration of the Fiscal Year 2026 THUD, the transportation appropriation bill, will begin in the Senate this week. That is the plan, and we're working to try to accomplish that, and will lay a groundwork for Congress to fully fund the Department of Transportation and the FAA with the resources it needs. The Senate appropriators passed the THUD bill in July by a vote of 27 to 1, very bipartisan demonstration there. Within this bill, we provided the Department of Transportation nearly \$26 billion and the FAA nearly \$20 billion between their operations and facility and equipment accounts, which fund air traffic control and modernization activities. This funding is, in part, there to allow Secretary Duffy and Administrator Bedford to modernize our national airspace system after decades of insufficient budget requests that merely sustained an outdated system.

This issue received particular attention by me on January 29 when the tragic circumstances occurred involving a flight from Wichita, Kansas to DCA occurred. It was a moment that this Congress, this subcommittee, and the administration all gathered around the idea of improving the safety of our airways. We must do our part to enable the FAA and the Department of Transportation to make certain that Americans remain the—that America remains the standard for aviation and air safety.

The sole integrator of the brand new air traffic control system is set to be announced soon and will fully fund the Department of Transportation for Fiscal Year 2026 as a necessary step to modernizing our airspace. We'll hear from industry about ways to potentially insulate the FAA from future government shutdowns. I introduced legislation in many Congresses that allow for the continuation of essential FAA activities in the event of future shutdowns. By examining the delays, the cancellations, the staffing triggers, and certification interruptions, we're laying the groundwork to better support an industry that is critical to our country.

Again, I thank all of our witnesses for being here and I look forward to this discussion, and I recognize the Ranking Member of the Committee, Senator Duckworth.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TAMMY DUCKWORTH,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM ILLINOIS**

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, today's hearing injects cheap, partisan politics into a subcommittee that, up until this point, had rightly prided itself on working in a bipartisan manner, whether you or I wielded the gavel. Using this subcommittee to mount a partisan attack on Senate Democrats

under the guise of exploring a question that everyone already knows the answer to—are shutdowns bad for aviation safety—is an unfortunate departure from our past practice. Yes, government shutdowns are bad. Shutdowns are painful for all members of the career civil service that Donald Trump has gleefully attacked and traumatized since the first day of his chaotic second term in office. Shutdowns harm Americans that rely on their government for critical support and services, like the hungry kids that Trump refused to feed, despite sitting on a \$6 billion SNAP contingency fund. That’s why Democrats voted to prevent a shutdown and voted repeatedly to reopen the government.

Look, it’s good that Senate Republicans finally agree with us that shutdowns are bad. I only wish there had been bipartisan agreement that millions of Americans losing healthcare coverage is also bad. Had Donald Trump and my Republican colleagues merely agreed with us on that principle, there would never have been a government shutdown in the first place, period. The sad irony is that failure to extend middle-class tax relief will hit red states the most, and the damage won’t be merely disruptive and damaging. It will be catastrophic for Americans already struggling to get by. If Republicans fail to cleanly extend the ACA tax credits, the uninsured rate in Kansas will explode by 32 percent in 2026, and in Texas, the threat is even worse with the Texas uninsured rate projected to skyrocket by 39 percent. Thirty-nine percent.

Now, when it comes to championing our chronically overworked and understaffed ATC workforce, I will take a backseat to nobody on this committee. I will not be lectured—I will not be lectured by a senator who professes to love our controllers only when it’s politically convenient, but when behind closed doors away from cameras, that Cancun-loving Senator not only failed to advocate for a max hiring requirement during FAA reauthorization negotiations, he actually opposed it. Let’s make it clear: the guy that you think loves air traffic controllers opposed max hiring requirements for air traffic controllers during FAA reauthorization.

So, if Senate Republicans truly cared about controllers beyond using them as partisan political pawns, they would’ve done what they’ve done numerous times before when they truly care about something: change the rules. Yet, not only did Senate Republicans fail to change the rules or allow a simple majority to reopen the government, they blocked numerous Democratic bills from passing that would’ve paid civil servants during the shutdown. They even failed to force a vote on Chairman Cruz’s bill to pay controllers during that shutdown. He had a bill to pay you.

I also don’t want to hear any BS about Donald Trump caring about air traffic controllers. If Trump cared about controllers being paid, he would’ve paid them. Does anyone seriously think that Donald Trump needs congressional permission to raid the Airport and Airway Trust Fund to keep the FAA operating during a shutdown? Please. He didn’t ask for permission to raid the DOD R&D accounts to ensure that the military received paychecks during a shutdown. I’m glad they did, but he paid them because he wanted to. He didn’t pay you because he didn’t want to pay you. When Trump cares about something, like building a ballroom, building out Argentina, denying SNAP benefits for low-income Americans,

he just does it. If he wanted to pay air traffic controllers, he would've paid you, consequences, laws, and norms be damned as far as he's concerned. Trump's failure to simply cut paychecks for air traffic controllers confirms what should have already been obvious: Donald Trump doesn't give a damn about the ATC workforce.

Look, the shutdown is over, but for a half million Illinoisans, millions of Texans, and over 200,000 Kansans, the threat of a devastating healthcare crisis looms large. This includes Americans like our witness here today, Mrs. Eileen Spickler of Ottawa, Kansas. Eileen's husband, Barry, may be forced to forego health insurance because they simply can't afford to lose \$1,100 in tax relief that enables them to afford their monthly premiums. Eileen and Barry are not unique. They're among the 24 million Americans who are desperate for Republicans to extend enhanced premium tax credits. This should be easy. We just need to strike a word or two or simply replace numbers in two places in the Tax Code. That's it. If Speaker Johnson had the courage to bring it to a vote, there are at least 229 votes in the House to pass the bipartisan Premium Tax Credit Extension Act, a Republican-authored bill that would cleanly extend the ACA's enhanced premium tax credits.

I truly hope Senate Republicans will see the light and realize delivering tax relief that makes healthcare affordable for middle-class Americans can be and indeed should be a commonsense affordability policy that unites Republicans and Democrats alike, and let's stop turning this committee into partisan sham attacks on one another and get down to the real work of keeping America's flying public safe. I yield back.

Senator MORAN. I'd like to introduce our witnesses for today. Our first witness is Nick Daniels, the President of the National Air Traffic Control Association. In his role, Mr. Daniels advocates for the dedicated air traffic controllers who oversee the—and safeguard our national airspace. Prior to his role, he served as an air traffic controller and as a former U.S. Marine. Our second witness is Chris Sununu, the President and CEO of Airlines for America, which represents our country's major carriers and cargo companies. Mr. Sununu is the former Governor of New Hampshire and the longest-serving Republican Governor in nearly a century. I believe it's your first appearance before a committee, and we welcome you. Our third witness, James Viola, and I believe this is a maiden appearance for you, Mr. Viola, is President and CEO of the General Aviation Manufacturers Association. In his role, Mr. Viola represents the interests of over 140 airframe, avionics engine, and component manufacturers for the aviation industry. And our final witness is Mrs. Eileen Spickler, a resident of Ottawa, Kansas. Mrs. Spickler, a special welcome to you.

I now recognize Mr. Daniels for his opening statement.

**STATEMENT OF NICK DANIELS, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS ASSOCIATION, AFL-CIO**

Mr. DANIELS. Thank you very much. Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Duckworth, other members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the effects of the 43-day Federal Government shutdown, the longest in American history. Every day that the shutdown continued, the margins of

safety that we and the flying public depend on were reduced in our Nation's airspace system.

I am proud to have earned the title of air traffic controller with 22 years of experience at both an FAA tower and an en route facility, as well as 5 years as an air traffic controller in the United States Marine Corps. Unfortunately, before the shutdown ended, air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals that NACA represents received one partial paycheck and two zero-dollar paychecks, despite working full time and, in many cases, mandatory overtime: seven weeks of work with no certainty of when we would be paid again. That said, controllers showed up and stepped up for the American flying public and for each other. No American should ever be forced to work without a paycheck, and failing to pay the workforce that keeps our skies safe is not acceptable and not sustainable.

Throughout the shutdown, air traffic controllers ensured that the safety of nearly 3 million passengers a day on more than 45,000 flights a day arrived at their destinations, and controllers did this while operating with an overall shortage of 3,800 fully certified controllers that the system requires. Now, the unfortunate reality is this is not new. NACA has been advocating for increased controller staffing for more than a decade. NACA thanks this committee for its work on—to address the shortage in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. It not only updated the FAA's controller staffing targets, it also requires the FAA to hire the maximum number of controller trainees for five years and deploy tower simulator systems at every FAA tower to improve training and reduce training times. This committee must continue its oversight role to ensure that the requirements it established come to fruition, but the effects of the shutdown had real consequences for hardworking, patriotic American workers.

Two weeks ago, we delivered over 1,600 handwritten letters from air traffic controllers to congressional offices expressing the hardships that they were experiencing. We heard from an air traffic controller that is training at our new facility. Her husband is a 20-year, five-time combat veteran who had 45 documented explosions and seven direct hits. He returned from Iraq and Afghanistan with a 100-percent permanent and total service-related disability. Consequently, she is the single source of income for her family. Their son just graduated an aviation school, but they couldn't afford to attend the graduation. In addition to training at her new facility, she sold plasma twice, started driving for DoorDash, and toward the end of the shutdown, she had to take a part-time job on her regularly scheduled days off. We heard from recent graduates of the Oklahoma City Air Traffic Controller Training in Oklahoma where they were resigning because they could not begin this challenging new career without a paycheck. We've heard from air traffic controllers who were struggling to find ways to pay for gas to get to and from work, while others struggled to pay for childcare so they could go to work.

Air traffic control is one of the most mentally demanding and high-consequence professions in the world. Every moment we are at work, it requires everything we have—focus, judgment, decisiveness, perfect decisionmaking—thousands of times a shift, and what

hangs in the balance is our responsibility to safety in order to prevent tragedy. Air traffic controllers must show up day in and day out, fully prepared to handle the stress, pressure, and the weight of our responsibility to the American flying public and their safety. And this is why NACA does support Chairman Moran's Aviation Funding Stability Act that would ensure the FAA would be able to pay employees and perform all of its functions in the event of a future shutdown. We also support the passage of any other legislation that would ensure this Nation's air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals are paid during any future shutdown, including Chairman Cruz's "Keep America Flying Act of 2026".

Air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals are this country's patriots, dedicated to the safety of the flying public, and they should never be subjected to these challenges that distract them from their critical safety responsibilities. They are real people, they are real Americans, and they were facing very real problems. They deserve better, and I'll be happy to take your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Daniels follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF NICK DANIELS, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS ASSOCIATION, AFL-CIO

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the National Air Traffic Controllers Association, AFL-CIO (NATCA) at today's hearing titled "Flying on Empty: How Shutdowns Threaten Air Safety, Travel, and the Economy."

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

NATCA takes great pride in its role as an aviation safety organization that stands shoulder-to-shoulder with government and industry stakeholders to ensure that the National Airspace System (NAS) remains the safest and most efficient in the world. The air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals NATCA represents are vital to the U.S. economy, ensuring the safe and efficient movement of passengers and cargo within the National Airspace System (NAS).

The NAS moves approximately 45,000 flights, 3 million passengers, and more than 59,000 tons of cargo every day across more than 29 million square miles of airspace. Although it remains the safest, most efficient, and most complex aviation system in the world, NATCA always strives to bolster safety, mitigate risk, and improve efficiency.

NATCA grieves for the families, friends, and communities that have been devastated by the aviation accident on January 29 at Washington National Airport (DCA), as well as the UPS cargo plane that crashed just after takeoff on November 4 from Louisville Muhammad Ali International Airport (SDF). Although NATCA does not comment on ongoing National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigations, these tragedies highlight the critical and high-consequence nature of air travel. NATCA remains steadfast in our commitment to work with all Federal agencies investigating these accidents to ensure we can identify the root causes.

NATCA's testimony today will focus on (1) the negative effects of government shutdowns, (2) the persistent challenges with controller staffing and funding for modernization programs that predate the most recent shutdown, and (3) the legislative solutions that would help eliminate future shutdown risks for the NAS and its frontline workforce.

#### **I. Negative Effects of Government Shutdowns**

NATCA shares in this Committee's serious concerns about the risks inherent in a government shutdown and the compounding negative effects a shutdown has on aviation safety and the U.S. economy. Government shutdowns—of any length—are also incredibly stressful and distracting for the nearly 20,000 air traffic controllers

and other aviation safety professionals NATCA represents, the vast majority of whom work without pay during a shutdown. This is not acceptable and not sustainable.

Nevertheless, during the recent 43-day shutdown, controllers continued to show up and step up for the American flying public and each other, deftly performing their safety-critical functions at the highest level despite operating 3,800 fully certified controllers short of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) staffing target.

Although NATCA is thankful that Congress reached an agreement last week to end the shutdown, the current continuing resolution (CR) funding the Department of Transportation and other departments and agencies expires on January 31, 2026. This means we could be facing another government shutdown less than three months since controllers and other aviation safety professionals were required to work full time without pay, including mandatory overtime in many cases. It would be incredibly unfair to ask these hard-working, patriotic American air traffic controllers and their families to prepare for or endure another protracted shutdown. We cannot continue to ask air traffic controllers and their families to bear the burden of policy disagreements in Congress.

*A. Shutdowns Historically Harm Controller Staffing and Delay the Development, Testing, and Implementation of Critical Modernization and Safety Programs*

Although it is difficult to predict what new challenges may arise during a shutdown, NATCA is extremely grateful to Department of Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy for keeping the FAA's controller hiring and training pipeline open, as well as his commitment to ensuring critical modernization and safety programs were not negatively affected during the shutdown.

In fact, for the first time ever, Secretary Duffy directed the FAA to continue hiring and training controller candidates at the FAA's Academy in Oklahoma City during the shutdown, thereby ensuring controller staffing would not be as negatively affected unlike previous shutdowns. From the beginning, NATCA has also strongly supported Secretary Duffy's plan to supercharge the hiring of controller trainees, bringing in the best and brightest controller candidates.

The controller workforce has been understaffed for more than a decade, resulting in mandatory overtime, including regular 10-hour days and six-day weeks. Last year, controllers at 40 percent of FAA facilities worked six days a week at least once per month. Several facilities require six-day workweeks every week. In addition, we may not know for months or years the negative effects of shutdowns on recruitment and retention. The FAA and NATCA are acutely aware of these thin staffing margins and the compounding effects they have on controller stress and fatigue.

Similarly, Secretary Duffy directed the FAA to continue supporting modernization, safety, and infrastructure programs through the shutdown. Thanks to his leadership, NATCA subject matter experts continued to participate in testing, development, and deployment activities. This was critical because any disruption would have severely hindered Secretary Duffy's critical initiative to modernize the FAA's physical and technological infrastructure, so that the U.S. continues to be the gold standard for global aviation. NATCA strongly supports this initiative, and controllers play a critical role in the development, testing, training, and implementation of new modernization and safety programs. We also thank Congress for its downpayment to modernize the air traffic control system. We look forward to working with you to secure the remaining funding.

*B. This Shutdown Pushed the System and Its Workforce to the Brink*

During the 43-day government shutdown, controllers and other aviation safety professionals received one partial paycheck and then missed two consecutive full paychecks. Asking these dedicated, patriotic American workers to survive working full time for more than a month without pay is simply not sustainable. That situation creates substantial distractions for individuals who are already engaged in extremely stressful work. The financial and mental strain increase risks within the NAS, making the system less safe with each passing day of a shutdown.

As a result, NATCA advocates were tireless in their pursuit and support of all possible solutions. NATCA consistently said that it would support any measure that would end the shutdown and pay air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals, including a clean CR. NATCA also strongly supported other bills that would have paid air traffic controllers during the shutdown.

Another alternative that NATCA continues to strongly support is Chairman Moran's bill, S. 1045, the Aviation Funding Stability Act of 2025, which would provide continuing appropriations for the FAA out of the Airport and Airways Trust Fund in the event of a shutdown. Over the years, NATCA has supported previous

versions of this bill and currently also supports substantially similar bills in the House of Representatives introduced by Rep. Aaron Bean (FL-04), H.R. 5455, and Rep. Steve Cohen (TN-09) and Rep. André Carson (IN-07), H.R. 5451.

With the recent shutdown in the past, but with another funding deadline looming in January, NATCA has turned its attention to supporting, advocating for, and passing Chairman Moran's bill, the Aviation Funding Stability Act of 2025. Shutdowns create real problems for real American workers, but the Chairman's bill solves many of those problems in a practical and sustainable way.

If it were to pass, the Aviation Funding Stability Act of 2025 would ensure that the FAA could operate despite a government-wide shutdown, meaning that controllers would not be forced to make difficult practical and financial choices as a result of not being paid such as how to pay for housing/rent, gas, food, and/or childcare services. Thus, these controllers and other aviation safety professionals would be able to remain completely focused on their safety-critical jobs, instead of worrying about paying the bills.

## **II. Persistent Challenges Remain That Predated Shutdown**

As we mentioned earlier, controller staffing and modernization funding challenges were two critical issues that predated the 43-day government shutdown. That is why NATCA continues to strongly support Secretary Duffy's initiatives to supercharge controller hiring and training and modernize the FAA's physical and technological infrastructure to support the NAS of the future.

### *A. Controller Staffing Remains Near a 30-Year Low and Had a Disproportionate Effect on System Capacity During the Shutdown*

The controller workforce has been understaffed for more than a decade, resulting in mandatory overtime, including regular 10-hour days and six-day weeks. Last year, controllers at 40 percent of FAA facilities worked six days a week at least once per month. Several facilities require six-day workweeks every week. The FAA and NATCA are acutely aware of these thin staffing margins and the compounding effects they have on controller stress and fatigue.

NATCA remains focused on improving the system-wide controller staffing shortage. A properly-staffed controller workforce is necessary in order to safely and efficiently meet all of its operational, statutory, and contractual requirements, while also having the personnel resources to research, develop, deploy, and then train the existing workforce on new procedures, technology, and modernization initiatives. Without a sustainable hiring, training, and staffing model like the one

outlined in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, which passed both chambers with overwhelming bipartisan support, the FAA will struggle to maintain the current capacity of the system, let alone modernize or expand it for new users. This Committee should continue to oversee the FAA's efforts to implement the staffing provisions contained in the Reauthorization Act, including maximum hiring and deployment of Tower Simulator Systems, which have proven to reduce training times by 27 percent.

### *B. FAA Safety and Technology Modernization Programs Need Additional Resources*

Controller staffing and infrastructure progress are inextricably linked. A properly-staffed workforce of fully certified controllers is needed for the FAA to successfully develop, test, deploy, and train the workforce on new technology and modernization programs on time and under budget. Without proper controller staffing, investments in infrastructure and modernization programs will not yield their full potential.

It is critical that NATCA remain a productive and collaborative partner throughout development, testing, training, and implementation across a wide range of safety, technology, and modernization programs. NATCA's continued involvement will ensure that the FAA delivers these initiatives to industry stakeholders and the flying public on-time and at a cost-savings to the American taxpayers. When NATCA representatives are not involved throughout the entirety of a process, modernization programs are delayed and experience cost overruns, because of extensive, costly, and time-consuming revisions following development, testing, and after implementation.

The FAA also must continue to be transparent with its need for increased Facilities and Equipment (F&E) funding so that it can meet its own equipment sustainment, replacement, and modernization needs. If not, it will continue to exacerbate the FAA's significant sustainment and replacement backlog. Failing to maintain and replace critical safety equipment that has exceeded its expected life introduces unnecessary risk into the system. These funding limitations also have prevented the FAA from designing and implementing new technologies that will improve safety. We are encouraged that FAA has increased its F&E request for Fiscal Year 2026 and the Senate Appropriations Committee has increased its allocation for F&E.

*C. FAA's Physical Infrastructure is Rapidly Aging and Many Facilities Have Exceeded Their Expected Lifecycles*

The FAA operates more than 300 air traffic control facilities of varying ages and conditions. The FAA's 21 Air Route Traffic Control Centers (ARTCCs) located in the continental United States were built in the 1960s and are more than 60 years old. The FAA's Terminal Radar Approach Control facilities (TRACONs) are, on average, more than 25 years old. In addition, the FAA has 132 combined TRACON/towers, which are, on average, approximately 35 years old. Finally, the FAA has an additional 131 stand-alone Towers which average more than 30 years old.

Many FAA facilities have exceeded their expected lifecycles. Others have major systems that have exceeded their expected functional lifecycle such as roofs, windows, HVAC systems, plumbing, and elevators, which no longer perform their necessary functions. Some of these issues have led to periodic airspace shutdowns and many others have led to safety concerns for the workforce. When these major systems fail, or facilities have integrity problems, it can lead to increasing delays, which negatively affect the flying public and the economy.

The FAA is addressing its aging infrastructure through a combination of (1) realignments and consolidations, (2) repairing, sustaining, and maintaining some facilities, and (3) replacing a handful of others. However, that process has been slow and hampered by funding limitations. The FAA will need a substantially increased investment in its F&E budget or a supplemental funding source to adequately maintain, let alone, replace its aging physical infrastructure.

Although NATCA recognizes that the FAA's future facility footprint is likely to be different than the current footprint, realigning and consolidating facilities for the sake of consolidation—or based on real estate considerations that are unrelated to the agency's core mission—is not in the best interest of the NAS or the flying public. As the FAA considers options for ATC facility realignment and consolidation, several key factors should be considered such as safety, continuity, capacity and efficiency, cost savings, and the effects on the workforce. NATCA stands ready to partner with Congress, the Administration, and the FAA to address these critical issues.

### **III. Legislative Solutions to Future Shutdown Risks**

During the shutdown, NATCA consistently said that it would support any measure that would end the shutdown and pay air traffic controllers, including a clean CR. But NATCA also strongly supported numerous other bills that would have paid controllers during the shutdown. However, now is the time to pass long-term, meaningful legislation so that controllers and other aviation safety professionals don't ever have to experience that level of stress and financial instability again.

*A. NATCA strongly supports S. 1045, Chairman Moran's Aviation Funding Stability Act of 2025, which would ensure the FAA has stable and predictable funding in the face of future shutdown threats.*

Chairman Moran's bill, S. 1045, the Aviation Funding Stability Act of 2025, would provide continuing appropriations for the FAA out of the Airport and Airways Trust Fund in the event of a shutdown. NATCA also supports substantially similar bills in the House of Representatives. With another funding deadline looming in January, Chairman Moran's bill has become one of NATCA's top priorities.

During the shutdown, NATCA also supported several other Senate bills that would have appropriated funds to pay Federal employees, including NATCA air traffic controllers: S. 3012—The Shutdown Fairness Act introduced by Sen. Ron Johnson (WI); S. 3039—The True Shutdown Fairness Act introduced by Sen. Chris Van Hollen (MD); S. 3031—The Keep America Flying Act introduced by Sen. Ted Cruz (TX); and S. 3043—The Military and Federal Employee Protection Act introduced by Sen. Gary Peters (MI).

NATCA strongly supported each of these bills because they would have alleviated the financial hardships created by the shutdown by paying certain groups of Federal employees, such as air traffic controllers and members of the military.

*B. Other Aviation Safety Legislation*

NATCA strongly supports other legislation that would improve aviation safety.

One of those bills is the bipartisan agreement between Chairman Cruz and Ranking Member Cantwell on S. 2503—the Rotorcraft Operations Transparency and Oversight Reform (ROTOR Act), which would improve aircraft safety in and around airports.

Additionally, NATCA supports S. 1985—the Safe Operations of Shared Airspace Act of 2025, which would improve aviation safety, enhance safety reporting systems, improve controller training, and extend FAA's max hiring requirements contained

in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 for an additional five years, because it will take a long-term commitment to fully staff the air traffic controller workforce.

Finally, NATCA supports both bills that Ranking Member Duckworth and Senator Hoeven are soon to introduce regarding controller and pilot mental health. Both the Mental Health in Aviation Act and the Aviation Medication Transparency Act will improve safety by bringing mental health to the forefront improving access to care and medication.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

NATCA will continue to leave shutdown politics unrelated to aviation safety to the elected representatives in Congress. Controllers did not start the shutdown and were not responsible for ending the shutdown.

Congress now must engage in bipartisan negotiations on other pressing issues facing our Nation so that we are not back in the same position nine weeks from now. Congress also must prioritize passing Chairman Moran's bill so this never happens to controllers and aviation safety professionals again.

NATCA looks forward to working with members of this Committee, the Administration, appropriators, all other Members of Congress, and aviation stakeholders to achieve these and many other shared goals.

Thank you for holding this important hearing and providing the opportunity to testify.

Senator MORAN. Mr. Daniels, thank you. Senator Sununu—Senator. Excuse me. I know a Senator Sununu. Governor Sununu.

#### **STATEMENT OF GOVERNOR CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO), AIRLINES FOR AMERICA**

Mr. SUNUNU. Sorry, no senator here, but I appreciate it. Well, let me just begin by obviously thanking Chairman Moran and Senator Duckworth for holding the hearing. Coming off the unprecedented 6-week shutdown, the airline industry definitely appreciates the promptness that this body showed in having this discussion on how government shutdowns not just affect the airlines, but the American people and the American economy.

I also want to recognize and thank the efforts of the TSA employees, the CBP employees, and, of course, the air traffic controllers represented here by Nick Daniels, all those individuals who showed up week-in and week-out without paychecks, without certainty, and made those personal sacrifices because they understood that the national airspace isn't something that this country can put at risk. They understood that the airline industry and its people, they are a national strategic asset and, I hope we can all agree, should never be used as a political football. Now, the good news is we all know that this problem can and should be avoided, and there are opportunities before this body that would remedy the situation, not just temporarily, but permanently. That leads me to a special thanks to Chairman Moran for his Aviation Funding Stability Act. We need solutions like this to be implemented to shield the FAA and its workforce from the politics of a shutdown.

So, let me put into perspective the trends that the industry saw and was forced to react to as that shutdown progressed, one of the bigger questions that we receive. Typically, on any given regular travel day, we can expect to see any controller staffing shortages cause about 5 percent of the overall delay. So, for every delay that's out there, 1 out of every 20 might be because of a staffing shortage on a typical day. And so, to ensure safety during the first 4 weeks of the shutdown, we saw that number triple to 16 percent, which, again, to put into perspective, the cancellations weren't there,

right? The delays were there because it was all about safety, but for the cancellations in those first 4 weeks, it was well under one percent of actual cancellations, which means the system was slowed down with increased delays, but the airlines, the FAA, the air traffic controllers themselves, they were mitigating the situation around the clock to ensure that passengers were getting where they were going and they were doing it safely. It was a herculean effort, but with far better results than were seen in the last 2019 shutdown.

Then came Halloween, which was America's true nightmare for our passengers. After four weeks of building pressures, the controller shortage spiked and remained elevated through the remainder of the shutdown. I'll leave it to Nick here to describe a lot of the strains felt by each of those individuals and their families, but understandably, it was clear that the system that was understaffed and antiquated before the shutdown was now overwhelmed. On November 6, the FAA released Order Number 1, outlining the required airspace reductions starting at four percent, with the idea that it would build to 10 percent of forced cancellations in about a week. And these numbers may not sound like a lot, but for airline operations that require crew placement, management, asset placement, you know, moving the actual airplanes to get them into position and repositioned, and then dealing with all the customer service demands that inevitably will result from such cancellations, it really became a 24-hour, nonstop logistical nightmare for the airlines themselves.

Just three days later, the number of delays had dropped, but the cancellations increased, had skyrocketed not to 4, but to well over 10 percent, and cancellations themselves increased from about 140 around November 5 to 2,800, 20 times that, in just 4 or 5 days. Luckily, the Senate passed the Continuing Resolution less than a week after the initial order, but believe me when I tell you that while safety was always maintained through the shutdown, there were discussions within the industry that in order to ensure that level of safety, which is absolutely required, much larger portions of the American commercial fleet may have to be grounded because, logistically, it just wouldn't have been possible to keep meeting those cancellation requirements.

So, what did this cost us? And by "us," I don't mean the airlines. I mean, what did this cost America? The airlines themselves were taking a hit of about \$50 million a day just in the potential refunds to canceled passengers, but, more importantly, the American economy was feeling all of these dominoes fall. And when you add the impact to airlines and hotels and restaurants and rentals, the low estimate we found says that the flight cancellation impact was close to \$500 million per day by November 10, and for the entirety of the shutdown, some estimates are clocking it at a \$20 billion hit to America's GDP.

So, how do we make sure this doesn't happen again? First, it's—as it was outlined here, Congress has to pass the Transportation and Homeland Security appropriation bills, a minimum first step that's critical for all airspace functions. Second, Senator Moran's Aviation Funding Stability Act will pay for FAA during times of government shutdown. It's a public-private partnership, and we ap-

preciation—we appreciate his leadership to ensure that the government is living up to its responsibility to the American public. And third, we’re grateful for the first \$12-and-a-half billion, but there’s another \$19 billion that absolutely has to come. Modernization is absolutely key, but you can’t just put in one piece of the puzzle. The whole thing has to be there. And so, to ensure those funds are there are going to be critical to making sure that, again, we don’t have a lasting problem in America’s airspace. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Sununu follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF GOVERNOR CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER (CEO), AIRLINES FOR AMERICA

Good afternoon, Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Duckworth and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Chris Sununu, and I am the President and CEO of Airlines for America (A4A). Thank you for inviting me here today, and on behalf of all our A4A members<sup>1</sup>, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the Subcommittee’s expeditious examination of legislative solutions to end the practice of using the traveling and shipping public as pawns during Federal government shutdowns.

The old adage “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results” can surely be applied to the circumstances of the last couple months and the specter of yet another potential shutdown at the end of January 2026.

*Urgent Legislative Actions Needed:* In the short term, I believe two actions are clearly necessary:

1. Congress must pass the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bills to make sure the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are not subject to shutdown impacts for the rest of FY 2026; and
2. Congress must identify and enact solutions that will ensure the FAA, TSA and CBP are insulated from the impacts of any future lapses in appropriations, ensuring their employees can continue their work uninterrupted and with pay.

Chairman Moran, I would like to specifically thank you for your leadership in trying to find legislative solutions that would alleviate many of the impacts felt by the aviation community and the traveling and shipping public. The bill you introduced in March (S. 1045), which would address the lapse in appropriations for the FAA, is a tremendous starting point, and I am hopeful we can carry these types of provisions over to the TSA and CBP who also play a critical role in supporting the daily operations of the aviation sector.

I am in no manner downplaying the criticality of other government agencies or employees impacted by the shutdown; however, the unique nature and funding structure of our aviation system should allow for efficient and effective budgetary contingency plans that would allow FAA, TSA and CBP to operate normally during shutdowns caused by a lack of funding.

*Shutdown Impacts are Disastrous:* More than most, this Subcommittee knows that shutdowns are not new and they are becoming more frequent. In just the last 15 years alone, the FAA has been subjected to several partial or government-wide budget reductions and shutdowns.

- In July 2011, the lapse in FAA’s authorization caused the FAA to stop work on numerous projects including air traffic control modernization projects;
- In April 2013, the government-wide sequester caused the FAA to furlough air traffic controllers resulting in massive delays throughout the air traffic control (ATC) system and the cancellation of hundreds of flights, impacting hundreds of thousands of passengers;

<sup>1</sup>A4A is the trade association for the leading U.S. airlines, both passenger and cargo carriers. Members of the association are Alaska Airlines; American Airlines; Atlas Air; Delta Air Lines; FedEx; JetBlue Airways; Southwest Airlines; United Airlines; and UPS. Air Canada is an associate member.

- In October 2013, the government shutdown resulted in many FAA employee furloughs; and
- In December 2019, the partial government shutdown resulted in many FAA employee furloughs.

Today, we find ourselves recovering from another government shutdown—this one 43 days long, the longest in history, with the looming threat of another in January.

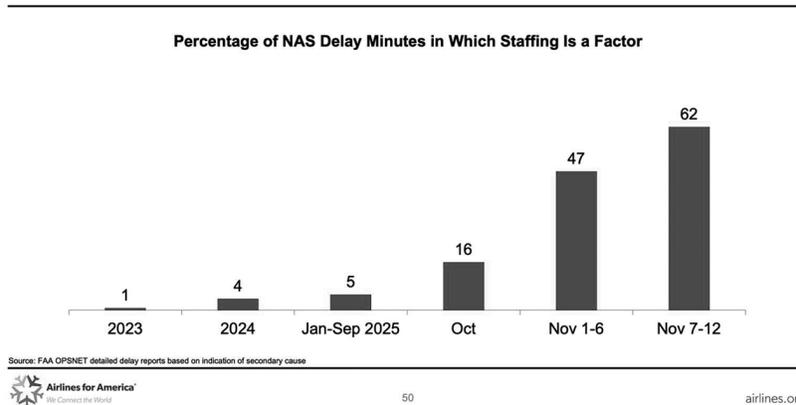
Too much is at stake to continue with the status quo. Commercial aviation drives 5 percent of U.S. GDP and helps to support more than 10 million U.S. jobs. We operate the safest mode of transportation, with U.S. airlines alone operating 27,000 flights carrying 2.7 million passengers and 61,000 tons of cargo every day across the globe.

Shutdowns drive both human and economic consequences and can impact safety throughout the national airspace. Airlines effectively mitigated the brunt of the impacts of the shutdown through October and early November. After 5 weeks of managing an already strained system, fatigue and economic pressures on controllers drove increased staffing triggers resulting in the FAA implementing a flight reduction program for 40 airports around the country. The FAA cited an increase in pilot reports that highlighted the growing weariness among air traffic controllers as well as a couple of near-miss ground events that raised concerns among the regulators. Administration officials linked this safety risk to the financial strain of working without pay for such an extended period. We cannot ignore the long-standing underlying issue, which is that our system has been experiencing an air traffic controller shortage for many years. A4A's top priority during the most recent FAA Reauthorization cycle was to address the controller shortage as well as our country's antiquated air traffic control technology. Unfortunately, this shutdown moved ATC staffing and modernization efforts two steps backwards.

The data from this most recent shutdown shows the material impact and real-world consequences of extended shutdowns and will hopefully convince policymakers that we should never subject our air traffic control system to this chaos again.

*Controller Staffing Triggers and Operational Limitations.* According to FAA data, controller staffing issues contributed to 5 percent of National Airspace System (NAS) delay minutes from January through September, jumping to 16 percent in October and 62 percent in November. Over 6 million A4A member airline passengers were affected during the shutdown.

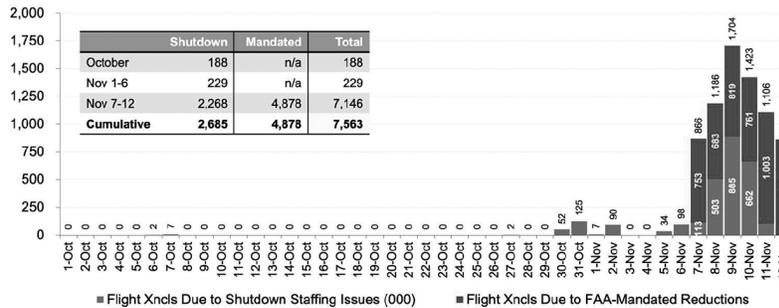
**Staffing Issues Are Increasingly Contributing to National Airspace System (NAS) Delays**



Many of the disruptions faced by passengers between October 1 and early November were a function of controller staffing-driven flight delays. During that period, A4A airlines incurred over 30,000 staffing-related delays but were able to minimize cancellations to about 400 (<0.1 percent). This shutdown disrupted 3.7 million passengers in that time period and pushed the airlines to scramble to minimize customer impacts. The air traffic controller staffing issues then led to an unprecedented shutdown consequence where the FAA issued an Emergency Order (Order #1) directing air carriers to reduce domestic schedule operations across the NAS at 40 airports. Specifically, Order #1 directed a 4 percent reduction in operations on Friday, November 7, ramping up to 6 percent by November 11, 8 percent by November 13

and 10 percent by November 14. On November 12, citing substantial and rapid improvement in facility staffing conditions, the FAA issued a new Emergency Order (Order #2), which superseded Order #1. Order #2 modified the operational limitation escalation to 6 percent. From November 7—the first day of the FAA-mandated flight-schedule reductions—through November 12, A4A airlines incurred more than 15,600 staffing-related delays and more than 7,100 staffing-related flight cancellations, disrupting 2.3 million passengers.

**A4A Member Airlines: Flight Cancellations Attributable to Controller Staffing Issues**  
October 1-November 12, 2025



Source: A4A summary of data provided by Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue Airways, Southwest Airlines and United Airlines



The operational reduction percentages may seem trivial to the average observer, but when put into context they are extreme. On November 12, for example, 99.8 percent of the 861 staffing-related cancellations were attributable to FAA-mandated flight reductions at 40 airports. For perspective, *in November 2024*, data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics show that *U.S. airlines canceled just 0.46 percent of scheduled flights—and that’s across all categories of causation, including NAS issues*. Promulgating a cancellation rate of 6 percent for several consecutive days, if not longer, for ATC staffing reasons alone, without a chance for operations to recover, is highly disruptive to our customers and takes a toll on our frontline employees—at the airport, on the plane, on our help desks, etc. At the 40 target airports, applying the 6 percent directive translates to approximately 875 cancellations and 60,000 disrupted passengers per day which is more than 13 times the normal rate.

A4A estimates that if Order #1 would have reached the original 10 percent threshold, by November 14, the daily average toll on the U.S. economy would have reached as much as \$580 million depending on the degree to which airlines could reaccommodate cancellation-disrupted passengers on the remaining flights.

Of note, that economic impact estimate is tied solely to compliance with the flight-reduction directive, and it does not include the costs associated with the value of passenger time, reduced bookings, passenger refunds, etc. It does include indirect and induced impacts tied to reduced visitor spending, state and local tax revenue and spending across the broader economy as individuals within and outside the aviation supply chain curtailed expenditures.

The air traffic controller staffing crisis also triggered broad secondary impacts. In many instances, even those passengers who successfully reach their destination encountered long departure delays, extended tarmac times and highly unpredictable arrival times. For the airlines, many flight crews were timing out (per regulated limits) or missing connections because of late aircraft arrivals and equipment mis-positioning.

For the controller staffing issues in particular, unlike weather-driven disruptions, each controller shift change or facility staffing trigger could result in added hours of delay with no advance notice, undermining the airlines’ ability to plan, staff or accommodate impacted customers. Despite airline mitigations, it created mass disruptions and should serve as an example of the real-world economic and human impact of a government shutdown. This simply should never happen again, and it is most certainly preventable.

*Transportation Security Impacts.* Adequately staffing and supporting the DHS and its component agencies, TSA and CBP, is also extremely important to the

smooth operation of the aviation sector and is vital to our industry. In 2025 to date, U.S. airlines have experienced travel volumes comparable to last year's all-time high. Several of the busiest days in TSA history have occurred in 2025, including a record-setting 3.1 million passengers and crewmembers screened on June 22.

Fortunately, from a TSA perspective, most hot spot locations during the shutdown were appropriately mitigated by TSA deploying personnel from its National Deployment Force to help support airports with higher travel volumes. However, as the shutdown progressed, some airports were starting to experience negative operational impacts of higher Transportation Security Officer (TSO) call-out rates.

The shutdown also had larger security impacts via the temporary expiration of several critical security authorities that the Committee and Congress should consider granting permanent authority in order to avoid future lapses. Specifically:

- *TSA's Reimbursable Screening Services Program (RSSP)*: The RSSP program is a vital component to distributed passenger screening for the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup events and TSA should be granted permanent authority.
- *Authority for the Unified National-Level Response to Persistent Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Disruption of Operations at Core 30 Airports expired on Sept. 30, 2025*. TSA is the Lead Federal Agency responsible for overseeing any Counter-UAS (C-UAS) response to persistent and disruptive UAS activities at our Nation's airports. Disruptive UAS in restricted airspace around our Nation's airports remains a persistent and evolving threat with thousands of sightings reported annually. Congress should extend and expand C-UAS authorities immediately to ensure the NAS is protected from errant, disruptive and nefarious UAS.
- The expiration of the *2015 Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act (CISA'15)* led many industries to reevaluate the risk of voluntarily sharing cybersecurity information with the Federal government. CISA'15 established a legal framework that is intended to facilitate the voluntary sharing of cyber threat indicators and defensive measures between and within the Federal government and non-federal entities, including private sector organizations and state, local, tribal and territorial, including airlines.

From a passenger travel experience perspective, the Administration was fortunately able to utilize reconciliation funds included in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act to fund and pay CBP officers and TSA air marshals during the shutdown.

However, that only covered law enforcement officers and is likely a one-time solution, not a long-term remedy to address future shutdowns.

Finally, we are also concerned that the shutdown negatively impacted operational readiness for upcoming global events like the 2026 FIFA World Cup and America 250. Much work will need to be done to prepare for the safe and secure execution of these events and unnecessary government shutdowns are detrimental to the public-private collaboration necessary to ensure transit to and from these events is safe and secure.

#### **Solutions—ATC Staffing, Brand New Air Traffic Control System, Never Subject Aviation to Shutdown Again**

*Address the Air Traffic Controller Shortage.* One of the biggest detriments to growth in the airline industry has been the ongoing air traffic controller staffing shortage, which was an acute issue prior to the shutdown and will only be exacerbated by the long-term impacts of the most recent shutdown. Beginning in October 2023, airlines reduced their flying from the New York metropolitan area by 10 percent to accommodate the lack of controller staffing at critical facilities.

In November 2024, the Department of Transportation Inspector General (DOT IG) put out its DOT Top Management Challenges report. That report states:

- “. . . FAA has not ensured adequate controller staffing at its most critical facilities. For example, we (IG) found that 20 of 26 critical facilities were staffed below the Agency's threshold of 85 percent.”
- “FAA's implementation of pauses in air traffic controller training during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to controller staffing challenges by resulting in an increase in certification times for controllers. FAA needs improved resiliency in staffing and contingency planning for disruptions, and our audit work shows that FAA's lack of a plan to address *these staffing challenges limits the capacity of the NAS.*”

*Build the Brand New Air Traffic Control System.* The U.S. ATC system is very safe, but the lack of government action has made it inefficient, antiquated and far from the “gold standard” Americans deserve. Unnecessary travel delays cost the

U.S. economy and passengers more than \$30 billion annually. These delays are the direct result of systemwide ATC inefficiencies resulting from the use of outdated, World War II-era radar technology. Controllers are still using paper strips to control traffic instead of electronic strips. Some computer system updates are done with floppy disks. It should not be a surprise that flights between Washington, D.C., and New York used to take 55 minutes, but to account for air traffic delays and inefficiencies, these flights are now scheduled to take 80 minutes or longer. Despite being a vital part of U.S. economic infrastructure, our airspace and the technology that supports it is the modern equivalent of driving a horse and buggy on a gravel road. This lack of efficiency and the resulting reduced capacity directly and negatively impacts carriers' ability to grow and compete and robs consumers and the economy of growth, jobs and related benefits.

A4A is not alone with these recommendations, as we are part of an unprecedented, industry-wide broad aviation community coalition established earlier this year, the "Modern Skies Coalition". The coalition wholeheartedly endorses Secretary of Transportation Duffy's plans to "supercharge" air traffic controller hiring at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and modernize the air traffic control system. The Coalition strongly supported Congress's \$12.5 billion downpayment toward air traffic control modernization and we continue to advocate in support of Secretary Duffy's acknowledgment that additional funding of at least \$19 billion will be needed to completely build a new air traffic control system.

The most recent shutdown distinctly showed the lengths at which the FAA and the aviation community will go to maintain safety in the system, but it also plainly displayed the system's growing inefficiencies fragility. Congress has a responsibility to establish a governance and funding system that will provide stable and predictable funding to not only avoid future shutdown scenarios but also holistically address the controller shortage and the efficiency of the ATC system.

#### **Ensure the FAA Is Not Harmed by Another Government Shutdown**

This shutdown has demonstrated the serious safety, human and economic consequences of subjecting the aviation sector to this kind of stress and chaos. It must never happen again.

To that end, we strongly support Senator Moran's bill, S. 1045, that ensures that FAA continues to operate during a government shutdown by drawing on monies from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund (AATF). We know that aviation is an ecosystem and would additionally support the ability to pay TSA and CBP from existing user fees. We look forward to continuing to work with authorizers and appropriators on *any legislation that meets our goals of ensuring safety and the operating integrity of the FAA, TSA and CBP. Any bill achieving these goals will have our support.* This shutdown has demonstrated that our system can no longer withstand being collateral damage of Washington policy debates. The Congressional Budget Office's (CBO) January 2025 baseline projections for the AATF show end-of-year uncommitted balances of \$4.8 billion in FY 2025 and \$12.4 billion in FY 2035.

Our view is that the Administration and Congress should make changes to its administration of the AATF in such a way that continues the appropriators and authorizers important oversight role while giving the FAA the ability to more effectively utilize the AATF balance. This would bring the FAA's Operating and Facilities & Equipment (F&E) capital programs more in line with the approach taken for other transportation programs like the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, surface transportation contract authority from the Highway Trust Fund and the Airport Improvement Program.

We stand by to engage and discuss optimal pathways for creating sustainable and predictable funding mechanisms with Congress. Along with a general fund contribution, the FAA is mainly funded from the AATF, which is supported by aviation fuel taxes, ticket taxes and other fees. The FAA must be allowed to fully utilize the existing funds within the AATF to meet current obligations under the recently passed FAA reauthorization law and execute long-term focused investment to modernize the national air space. Developing a predictable source of funding via a multi-year account is necessary to begin recapitalizing major infrastructure assets and ensure the continued safety and efficiency of U.S. airspace.

#### **Conclusion**

On behalf of our member airlines, I would be remiss not to acknowledge and sincerely thank the dedicated employees at the DOT, FAA, DHS, TSA, and CBP who dutifully went to work during the shutdown. Despite significant and prolonged hardships, they kept our aviation system operational and safe. We are extremely grateful for their efforts and hopeful that their professionalism does not come into play again on January 30, 2026.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. As we approach Thanksgiving—which is expected to see a record 31 million passengers over the holiday—I strongly urge Congress to pass the annual appropriations bills and find long-term solutions to expeditiously enact practical solutions that will eliminate any future air transportation disruptions caused by government shutdowns.

Senator MORAN. Thank you. Mr. Viola.

**STATEMENT OF JAMES A. VIOLA, PRESIDENT AND  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GENERAL AVIATION  
MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION**

Mr. VIOLA. Senator Moran, Senator Duckworth, and members of the Subcommittee on Aviation Space and Innovation, thank you for inviting me to testify regarding the impact of the recent government shutdown on the aviation sector. GAMA is privileged to represent companies that continuously modernize and improve existing aircraft fleet and are working on new aircraft and new technologies that will transform aviation. I want to acknowledge the dedication and sacrifice of the FAA employees and others who are responsible for the safety and the security of the aviation sector. They have conducted themselves commendably, despite multiple missed paychecks and job uncertainty.

As a former FAA employee, I saw firsthand how difficult shutdowns are for the Agency and the workforce, and I know they're not easily recovered from. The shutdown limited the FAA to conducting essential activities only, which are those necessary to protect life and property or required by law. As the shutdown continued, the FAA recognized that the delays in oversight and design approval certification activities were increasing and delaying U.S. development of product improvements and safety-enhancing technologies, and the leadership began to call back more of the workforce inside the FAA to conduct additional safety oversight and limited certification activities. Nevertheless, the shutdown significantly disrupted important activities of the FAA, including areas that this Congress prioritized during the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, such as FAA workforce growth and development, FAA certification activities, and the support of U.S. technologies and innovation.

The most important impact of the 2025 government shutdown on manufacturers is that they saw no new certification projects or other applications were allowed to start. Even with the shutdown's end now, the FAA will be unable to act upon all those new applications immediately, which will likely take months before they can get at them. The FAA certification and safety workforce, recruiting and skills enhancement, and training initiatives were also severely impacted by the shutdown. We are very concerned about approximately 600 engineers, pilots, inspectors, and technical specialists that AVS was actively hiring when the shutdown began on October 1. These candidates were left in limbo and may now decide not to pursue Federal employment. The shutdown also resulted in missed opportunities to advance U.S. leadership in global international aviation forums that support U.S. aviation standards and technology. It also delayed critical safety oversight functions, like flight testing, and those will require months to reschedule.

Another area of continued impact is rulemaking, again, including many directed by the 2024 Reauthorization Act, in areas like aviation safety, cybersecurity, certification modernization, and drone detect-and-avoid technology. These issues underscore the importance of Congress acting quickly now to pass the Fiscal Year 2026 Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development appropriations bill. Passage will provide the needed stability to the Agency and allow for key investments in the workforce modernization and aviation safety. We strongly support Senator Moran's Aviation Funding Stability Act to avoid effects of future shutdowns, as well as legislation introduced by the House Transportation and Infrastructure Chair Graves, and Ranking Member Larsen, and others to address these issues. We appreciate these initiatives and will stand ready to work with everyone to find the best path forward.

In the wake of the accident at DCA, the aviation industry came together to form the Modern Skies Coalition to focus on air traffic modernization and staffing issues. The shutdown was counter-productive to these modernization and staffing efforts. Like the aviation safety and regulatory issues I discussed earlier, we must all work to regain that momentum on these modernization priorities. It is a national imperative.

GAMA appreciates the opportunity to share the manufacturer industry's perspectives today, and I look forward to working with members of this subcommittee on efforts to improve the strength and operation of the FAA. Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Viola follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JAMES A. VIOLA, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, GENERAL AVIATION MANUFACTURERS ASSOCIATION

Senator Moran, Senator Duckworth, and members of the Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation, on behalf of the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA), thank you for inviting me to testify on the impact of the recent government shutdown on the aviation sector. We appreciate the opportunity to highlight how the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and partner agencies have fulfilled essential services and worked with manufacturers, maintenance, and training providers since October 1st to keep the FAA certification process and other aspects of aviation safety functioning during difficult times as well as outlining some impacts on product development, innovation, and U.S. aviation global leadership. Finally, I want to highlight some steps where industry and government can work together to advance aviation safety, its economic contributions, and competitiveness.

By way of background, GAMA is an international trade association representing more than 140 companies which comprise most of the world's leading manufacturers of general aviation airplanes, rotorcraft, engines, avionics, advanced air mobility powered lift aircraft, components, and related technologies. GAMA members are also providers of maintenance and repair services, fixed-based operations, pilot and maintenance training, and aircraft management companies. In the U.S., general aviation supports \$339 billion in total economic output annually and 1.3 million total jobs<sup>1</sup>, with GAMA companies having facilities in 49 states. General aviation contributes to the economies of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge the dedication and sacrifice of Federal employees, including those at the FAA, partner agencies, and contractors, who are responsible for the safety, security, and economic health of the aviation sector. They have missed multiple paychecks, creating economic and emotional distress for employees and their families, including job status concerns in some cases. As a former FAA employee, I have seen how difficult shutdowns are for the agency and its workforce and know firsthand they are not easily recovered from. While the controller workforce has rightly been the focus of attention, these pay and job issues have

<sup>1</sup> *Contribution of General Aviation to the U.S. Economy, PwC, February 2025*

challenged thousands of FAA employees, including those dealing with aviation safety issues for certification, manufacturing, operations, maintenance, and training.

On a personal and professional level, myself, my colleagues, and the companies that we are privileged to represent deeply value these public sector servants. Retaining them and providing support is critical to ensure our industry and nation can recover from this setback. The U.S. aerospace sector is an extremely complex and interdependent system that relies on fully functioning government and industry partners to thrive.

#### **Managing the 2025 Shutdown for Aviation Manufacturing, Maintenance, and Training Organizations**

The shutdown limited FAA to conducting essential activities which are those “necessary to protect life and property” or required by law. For GAMA member companies, this was confined to safety inspections and oversight, continued operational safety and addressing unsafe conditions through Airworthiness Directives. A significant number of the FAA workforce in the Aviation Safety Aircraft Certification and Flight Standards offices were put on furlough. FAA leadership exercised discretion, within the limits of the law, to identify available options to enable safety and productivity. Consistently, the agency, its leadership, and workforce engaged with our member companies to ensure we were kept informed and addressed issues as they arose. This includes working with manufacturers and maintenance providers proactively to conduct safety oversight and authorizations to enable ongoing aircraft certification, production, and airworthiness activities. The ability for manufacturers to continue product development certification and manufacturing is largely attributed to the abilities of companies to utilize existing FAA-approved delegation and related authorities. However, the ability to maintain support for programs was hampered because FAA was unable to fully engage in continued designee appointment and oversight activities. Since the ability to travel was severely restricted, the FAA was able to leverage alternate methods for conducting oversight and witnessing key activities, including the use of locally available resources and digital capabilities like video.

The FAA recognized that delays in oversight and design approval certification activities increase systemic risk. In addition, this delays U.S. development of product improvements and safety-enhancing technologies from entering the National Airspace System (NAS). As the shutdown continued to extend into weeks, FAA started to recall portions of the workforce to conduct additional safety oversight, authorizations, and certification activities which enabled manufacturers, repair stations, and training organizations to safely continue ongoing operations.

Partner agencies are also to be commended for their management during the six-week shutdown. The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), supported by FAA engineers, pilots, and inspectors as needed, continued to launch and conduct investigations of accidents that occurred during the past month-and-a-half. This is a different approach from the 2018–2019 shutdown where NTSB only conducted limited work during the funding lapse which caused a significant backlog that the agency spent years recovering from with implications on volume and timeliness to complete reports.

Along with its critical role in security screening, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has also supported the general aviation sector. The agency’s Enrollment Services and Vetting Programs (ESVP) team conducted vetting of our pilots and training centers to support the industry during the shutdown. We want to say thank you to the TSA staff for their commitment to securing the transportation sector during these difficult times.

#### **Near and Long-Term Impacts of the 2025 Government Shutdown**

Despite this tremendous work and sacrifice by the FAA workforce, the shutdown significantly impacted important activities of the agency and U.S. manufacturers and aviation businesses. Many of the areas facing disruption were areas this Committee, and Congress as a whole, prioritized during the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 116–83) including international leadership; FAA workforce growth and development; supporting U.S. technology and aviation; important aviation safety, security, and technology rulemakings; and modernization of the certification processes. The FAA is now in a deeper hole for addressing these and meeting congressional direction and intent.

The most significant impact of the 2025 government shutdown on manufacturers is that no new certification projects were allowed to start which impacted the pace of U.S. aerospace innovation and completely halted new business activities. During the shutdown, the FAA could not accept or facilitate work on any new applications for design and production approvals. GAMA is privileged to represent companies

that continuously modernize and improve the existing aircraft fleet through safety retrofits, avionics upgrades, improved systems reliability fixes, and deployment of NTSB recommended safety enhancements. In addition, these companies are investing in the development of new future aircraft and technologies that could transform aviation. But the government shutdown results in delays to these projects. This significant backlog includes supplemental type certificates and modifications to existing aircraft. For example, there are many repair stations located in nearly every state which install supplemental type certificates (STCs) for new safety enhancing and other modern capabilities in aircraft. It is very common for customers to have specific requests for modification to their aircraft such as a different model of equipment, type of seat, or interior configuration which requires a change to the previously approved STC. The FAA will be unable to act upon all these new applications immediately and these will likely impact certification activities for months to come.

FAA Aviation Safety workforce in aircraft certification and flight standards recruiting and skills enhancement and training initiatives were also severely impacted by the shutdown. As an organization that has endured leadership changes and retirements, the opportunity to grow and maintain technical expertise is critical and something that the 2024 FAA Reauthorization strongly encouraged. A significant concern involves the approximately 600 engineers, pilots, inspectors, and technical specialists that AVS was actively hiring when the shutdown began. These candidates were left in limbo and may now decide not to pursue Federal employment. It takes 6–12 months to train a new certification engineer before they can just start to be productive. It is a multi-year process to qualify a new flight test pilot. This highlights the compounding effect of lost time and lost applicants. It isn't a six-week disruption, it's a multi-year set back, particularly for highly technical and unique skills such as structural loads, software, hybrid propulsion, system safety, and flight test pilots.

For these highly technical safety positions, direct-hire authority is one of the FAA's most effective tools for attracting, rebuilding and sustaining the specialized technical talent pipeline and ensuring the agency can meet its safety mission, support U.S. innovation, and uphold global aviation leadership. The FAA competes directly with manufacturers, technical firms, and global aerospace companies for the same highly skilled professionals, and industry hires in days while the traditional Federal hiring process can take months. Direct-hire authority allows the FAA to recruit in weeks instead of losing top candidates to faster-moving employers. Several of these direct-hire authorities for engineers, pilots, and inspectors expire at the end of this year so we recommend that this be extended or permanently implemented for these highly specialized safety positions particularly given the shutdown.

Additionally, the FAA was prevented from engaging in key aviation safety and cooperation leadership discussions both domestically and internationally. During the months of October and November, the FAA had to cancel InfoShare, the premier annual aviation safety data exchange conference, and was unable to fully participate in events at the International Civil Aviation Organization, Annual Certification Management Meetings with leading states of design, to advance aviation safety bilateral cooperation.

This inactivity reduces U.S. global leadership in aviation and misses opportunities to advance standards and implementation procedures which facilitate efficient global acceptance of new aviation products and technologies such as commercial aircraft, Advanced Air Mobility powered-lift aircraft, and electric and hybrid propulsion systems. Typically, strong engagement in these meetings provides opportunities to engage and establish global standards, promote safety, and facilitate industry growth. Because of the government shutdown, FAA participation was cancelled or limited in nature, diminishing the agency's leadership and standing with their peers. Competing authorities continue moving forward while FAA is frozen, making the U.S. appear unreliable as a certifying authority and, because of U.S. absence at international aviation standards meetings, provide opportunity for foreign States of Design to shape global rules.

Limitations on agency travel during the government shutdown have also had strong impacts. There are certain certification testing activities which require FAA involvement with technical experts that are not available at local offices. For example, FAA flight testing is a critical activity that requires specific pilot expertise which is very limited and tightly scheduled but needed across all aircraft manufacturers. The inability to conduct all needed safety functions such as flight testing directly impacts critical FAA resources and has created a backlog of activities that will continue to delay manufacturer certification activities for several months. This adds uncertainty and a lack of predictability in government and industry planning

and coordination and undermines the agency's ability to meet commitments that slow down critical agency oversight and the work of U.S. manufacturers.

FAA workforce availability is essential to effectively and efficiently work through the backlog of activities that build up during the shutdown and restoring U.S. aviation business activities and competitiveness in product development, innovation, manufacturing, and global exports. Given the amount of change and uncertainty for the Federal workforce this year, further exacerbated by the six weeks of shutdown, one of the greatest challenges and significant risk to recovery is the backlog of the individual personal time off (PTO) "use-or-lose" annual leave benefit which must be used by January 10, 2026, or be forfeited. Consistent with what was implemented following the 2018–2019 shutdown, we recommend that the Administration extend the ability for Federal employees to use their earned PTO annual leave benefit at least to the end of CY2026 so that the FAA does not face a significant workforce shortage in November and December when they are needed most for starting to make up for lost ground.

Another area where there are impacts is the FAA's regulatory and rulemaking efforts. A contributing factor in delaying U.S. manufacturer product development activities, preventing safety and innovation from moving forward and benefitting the aviation system, has been significant delays in the FAA's promulgation of rulemaking, policies, and guidance. This has caused a large backlog of regulations, technical standards, policy memos, orders, and advisory circulars which enable new products and technologies and efficient certification processes.

Delays in promulgating modernization updates to airworthiness standards impede industry's ability to implement safety improvements and enhancements. This also causes significant regulatory and cost burdens on both industry and FAA by requiring individual redundant and inefficient processes for issue papers, special condition and exemption rulemakings, increasing risk and unpredictability when these regulatory materials are not adopted in a final format. Unfortunately, FAA regulatory and rulemaking processes for new standards and technology during the shutdown ceased, further compounding a situation that was already challenging. The result is that efforts to improve coordination, and yield support for safety, innovation, and international leadership for the entire aviation sector were effectively put on hold. This includes key congressionally directed rulemaking efforts in the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act. For example, work halted on current priority rulemakings such as disclosure of safety-critical information, cyber security, 5G radar altimeter safety, and transport airplane and propulsion certification modernization, as well as regulatory standards and materials to enable new technologies such as unmanned aircraft system detect and avoid.

Along with their other significant oversight activities, the FAA Flight Standards team has continued to provide oversight of our member company pilot and maintenance training centers, recognizing these industry operational capabilities as "essential" to support aviation safety. However, all new activities such as the qualification of new simulator equipment, course approvals, and new examiner designees were put on hold. The FAA resources to perform this work are already scarce and, based on the experience of the 2018–2019 shutdown, it may take six to nine months to recover in this area, constraining the capacity to maintain and train the pilot workforce.

### **Preventing Future Shutdowns**

The extension of Federal funding until January 30, 2026, means that it is imperative for Congress to act swiftly in passing a Fiscal Year 26 (FY26) Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations bill. While these proposed funding levels need to be reconciled and a final bill needs to be considered and passed, this legislation will make key investments in agency workforce staffing and training, modernization efforts, and aviation safety. We strongly urge policymakers to work to prioritize and complete a FY26 THUD Bill. Missing the opportunity to do so will only compound the challenges that the agency was already facing and have now mounted because of the government shutdown.

In the past, Congress has acted to address problems that have occurred at the FAA due to government shutdowns. For example, during a government shutdown in 2013 the FAA Registry Office was subject to closure, halting the registration and delivery of aircraft impacting almost \$2 billion in transactions<sup>2</sup>. The U.S. Congress addressed this in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization (P.L. 115–254) and deemed the office essential. Even with this legislation, the FAA realized that additional action

<sup>2</sup> GAMA Press Release—October 7, 2013

needed to be taken to realize the full purpose of this legislation and has acted during this shutdown to enable the issuance of airworthiness certifications.

For GAMA, and other industry leaders, it is critical that Congress take action to prevent future shutdowns from hampering the critical work of the FAA. Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) has introduced S. 1045, the Aviation Funding Stability Act of 2025, and similar legislation has been introduced by Congressmen Steve Cohen (D-TN), Andre Carson (D-IN) and Aaron Bean (R-FL) in the House. This legislation would enable the FAA to draw from the Airport and Airways Trust Fund, funded by users of the aviation system, to preserve the air traffic and safety operations of the agency. GAMA strongly supports this legislation and is open to working with all interested members on the best way to enact legislation that would protect the FAA as an entity from future shutdowns.

#### **The 2025 Government Shutdown and Air Traffic Modernization Efforts**

As we have seen, the 2025 government shutdown has led to air traffic challenges across the U.S. We owe a great deal of gratitude to FAA management and the controller and technician workforce in managing these challenges. Despite those efforts, commercial, cargo, business, and general aviation operations have all been reduced during the shutdown to work to maintain aviation safety and address increased risk.

In the wake of the accident at DCA, the aviation industry came together to form the Modern Skies Coalition, and GAMA is a proud Steering Committee member along with A4A and NATCA and many others. This broad group of industry stakeholders, including airlines, operators, manufacturers, labor unions, and airports have identified the following priorities:

- Robust funding for FAA to make critical ATC technology and infrastructure investment and to strengthen controller and technician staffing and training.
- Direction to FAA to achieve prudent divestment from legacy NAS elements and utilize existing procurement authority to facilitate the effective deployment of state-of-the-art technology.
- Realignment and modernization of ATC facilities to improve operational efficiencies and leverage technological developments.
- Exempting the FAA from government shutdowns to ensure more predictable funding and support for continued safety and air traffic control personnel hiring and training, and other critical FAA personnel.
- Continuation of general fund support for FAA operations and consideration of additional flexibility within the Airport and Airways Trust Fund to manage long-term facility and technology upgrades.

Thanks to this Committee, Congress took a big step forward in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (P.L. 119-21), in terms of progress on air traffic control investment. The law provided \$12.5 billion as a downpayment for ATC modernization efforts focused on the replacement of FAA radar and information display systems, construction of a new air traffic control center and realignment of existing facilities, recapitalization of terminal radar approach control facilities, and other safety and infrastructure investments.

While this is an important step, we know much work remains to modernize the U.S. ATC system. Notably, Transportation Secretary Duffy has repeatedly stated the cost of this effort is likely to be at least \$31.5 billion. Subsequent investment is likely to be focused on areas like a common automation platform and investment in air traffic towers and facilities. The shutdown was counterproductive to these modernization efforts and the addressing of controller staffing issues. Like the aviation safety and regulatory issues, we must all work to regain momentum on these Modern Skies priorities. It is a national imperative.

#### **Conclusion**

GAMA appreciates the opportunity to share these perspectives with the members of the Senate Aviation, Space, and Innovation Subcommittee. The aviation sector needs policymakers to work in a bicameral and bipartisan fashion to provide stability to the agency and make critical investments to advance safety and efficiency improvements for the industry. We now have more to overcome but the U.S. is on the cusp of a new dawn in aviation technology and innovation that will be considered one day in line with other achievements like the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk in 1903, and the moon landing in 1969.

It is our hope that these policy suggestions inform you and your colleagues on ways to improve the strength and operation of the FAA given its criticality in supporting aviation safety, air service to all U.S. communities, and economic growth

and competitiveness. Thank you and we look forward to working with this Subcommittee on these critical initiatives.

Senator MORAN. Thank you, Mr. Viola. Mrs. Spickler, you're now recognized for five minutes.

**STATEMENT OF EILEEN SPICKLER, ADVOCATE**

Mrs. SPICKLER. Thank you. Aviation Subcommittee Chair Moran and Aviation Subcommittee Ranking Member Duckworth, thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to be here today. Senator Moran, it was really nice to meet you in the airport yesterday. My name is Eileen Spickler, and I live in Ottawa, Kansas with my husband, Barry, who is here with me today. We moved to Kansas seven years ago from Gaithersburg, Maryland, to be closer to Barry's kids and grandkids. Being here has been a blessing and has allowed us to watch the grandchildren grow up.

I would like to sit here and tell you that we were affected by the many airport delays and canceled flights that were happening around the country. I have nothing but the utmost respect for the hardworking TSA agents, air traffic controllers, and others who worked overtime during the shutdown. The truth is that Barry and I cannot afford to travel right now. We would love to be able to visit friends and family, but the cost of a flight is just completely unfathomable to us right now. We are barely scraping by and struggling to afford our basic needs, and our healthcare costs keep going up each year. The only way we could be here today is due to the support of Families USA, and I want to thank Senator Duckworth's office for inviting us to share our story.

My husband, Barry, retired in—retired in June 2024 after 15 years of working as a government contractor for the Food and Drug Administration and after nearly 50 years in the workforce. Barry's retirement came earlier than we intended at age 63. Because the budget for his FDA contract was cut as a remote worker, Barry was marked for layoff because he could not report in person to Maryland. That's when our financial troubles really started, and it has been nearly impossible to keep our head above water ever since.

Barry runs a guitar booth at a local antique store and hosts weekly jam sessions for fellow musicians. He no longer has employer-sponsored health insurance, so in June 2024, we enrolled Barry in health insurance, joining the 200,000 Kansans on the ACA marketplace. Since enrolling in ACA coverage, Barry has undergone treatment for two kidney stones, one of them life threatening, and received numerous MRIs, CT scans, and X-rays that have all been covered by insurance. His plan is not perfect, and the cost of co-pays, premiums, and prescriptions have gone up each year, but the monthly payments have been affordable enough with the tax credits, and it has allowed Barry to get the care he needs. In 2025, we paid \$109 a month, and we received almost \$1,200 per month in subsidies. If it weren't for the premium tax credits, we would not have been able to afford insurance for Barry at all, and, honestly, I don't know where we'd be—or if we'd even be sitting here before you. Access to affordable health insurance is life and death for us.

In 2026, our plan is going up 125 percent, from \$109 to \$246 a month. Because of this increase and with the tax credits set to expire, we have decided not to enroll Barry in coverage for next year, and he will go uninsured until March when he is eligible for Medicare. At our age and with Barry's health issues, I'm terrified that in these two months, we could be faced with a health emergency we can't afford, and we'll end up buried in a mountain of medical debt. For the first time in our lives, we wait in line every other week at food pantries because that's the only way to afford our groceries. Earlier this week, the line in Ottawa was twice as long as it ever had been with an almost 3-hour wait.

We are so grateful for the Affordable Care Act because it has made it possible for us to survive on as little as we have right now. We're about \$100 a month over the poverty limit for Medicaid because Kansas is 1 of 10 states that has not expanded Medicaid. I am a cancer survivor, an aggressive cancer with a high likelihood of a recurrence, and I'm still in treatment 9 years later. I receive disability benefits and Medicare. The peace of mind of knowing that we both have affordable health insurance is everything to me, but these last few weeks, knowing we're facing a gap in Barry's insurance for next year is terrifying for us both.

Our story is unique, but we are not alone. There are 22 million Americans that use the premium tax credits to help them stay on health coverage. I am here fighting for my family and for the millions more who know the struggle of fighting to afford basic needs like healthcare. Healthcare is a human right. Nobody should go without it, and what is the point of having a healthcare plan if you can't afford to use it? I hope you will remember my story and take immediate action because we cannot afford to wait.

Thank you for your time and for the chance to tell my story.

[The prepared statement of Mrs. Spickler follows:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF EILEEN SPICKLER

Chair Cruz, Aviation Subcommittee Chair Moran, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Aviation Subcommittee Ranking Member Duckworth, thank you for holding this hearing and for inviting me to be here today.

My name is Eileen Spickler and I live in Ottawa, Kansas with my husband, Barry, who is here with me today. We moved to Kansas seven years ago from Gaithersburg, MD, to be closer to Barry's kids and grandkids. Being there has been a blessing and has allowed us to watch the grandchildren grow up. We also have three adorable, fluffy and snuggly cats—Angie, Kimmie, and Lilly—whom we adore.

I would like to sit here and tell you that we were affected by the many airport delays and cancelled flights that were happening around the country. I have nothing but the utmost respect for the hardworking TSA agents, air traffic controllers, and others who worked overtime during the shutdown.

But the truth is that Barry and I cannot afford to travel right now. We would love to be able to visit friends and family, but the cost of a flight is just completely unfathomable to us right now.

We are barely scraping by and struggling to afford our basic needs, and our health care costs keep going up each year. The only way we could be here today is due to the support of Families USA, and I want to thank Senator Duckworth's office for inviting us to share our story.

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That's when our financial troubles really started and it's been nearly impossible to keep our head above water ever since. Barry now runs a guitar booth at a local

antique store and hosts weekly jam sessions for fellow musicians. He no longer has employer-sponsored health insurance, so in June 2024 we enrolled Barry in health insurance, joining the 200,000 Kansans on the ACA marketplace.

Since enrolling in ACA coverage, Barry has undergone treatment for two kidney stones, one of them life-threatening, and received numerous MRIs, CT scans, and X-rays that have all been covered by insurance. His plan isn't perfect, and the cost of co-pays, premiums and prescriptions have gone up each year, but the monthly payments have been affordable enough with the tax credits and it has allowed Barry to get the care he needs.

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For the first time in our lives, we wait in line every other week at food pantries because that's the only way to afford our groceries. Earlier this week, the line in Ottawa was twice as long as it had ever been, with an almost 3 hour wait.

We are so grateful for the Affordable Care Act because it has made it possible for us to survive on as little as we have right now. We are about \$100 over the poverty line limit for Medicaid because Kansas is one of 10 states that has not expanded Medicaid. I am a cancer survivor and receive disability benefits and Medicare. The peace of mind of knowing we both have affordable health insurance is everything to me, but these last few weeks, knowing we're facing a gap in Barry's insurance for next year, is terrifying for us both.

Our story is unique, but we are not alone. There are 22 million Americans, and nearly 200,000 Kansans, that use the premium tax credits to help them stay on health coverage. I am here fighting for my family and for the millions more who know the struggle of fighting to afford basic needs like health care. Health care is a human right. Nobody should go without it, and what's the point of having a health care plan if you can't afford to use it? I hope you will remember my story and take immediate action, because we cannot afford to wait.

Thank you for your time.

Senator MORAN. Thank you for telling your story, and it is—it is planted in your Senator's mind. Thank you.

Mrs. SPICKLER. Thank you.

Senator MORAN. Let me see where to start with my questioning. Let's start with you, Mr. Sununu. Many Kansans will travel for the holiday. What do the airlines expect to be the circumstances those Kansans and Americans will face?

Mr. SUNUNU. As we go into the holiday, it's going to be full. It's going to be packed. The airlines are ready, the air traffic controllers are back, the skies are safe, so that's the great news. We want everyone to feel confident, first and foremost, about booking travel, but it'll be near record numbers, which is great. Looking into the Christmas season, we're hoping that those bookings pick up a little bit. I think some of the stories in October and some of the—just the politics around what was happening at the airlines scared a few people off, so we want them to know more than anything that, while it is going to be busy, the airlines and the system is ready, and it's more affordable than ever before, right? It's a better customer experience than ever before, more affordable domestically than ever before, more reliable now that we're out of the shutdown, and as an industry, we're looking to that end-of-January mark. That's the thing that scares us the most, but right now, we feel

very confident about where things are and where they should be through the holidays.

Senator MORAN. Mr. Daniels, what can we expect in the air traffic control world?

Mr. DANIELS. Well, one of the things that I think this shutdown showed time and time again is the unfortunate reality of where the air traffic controllers—the air traffic control system is, which is we operate with less—or 25 percent less than the required essential employees. We operate with 10,800 certified professional controllers where there should be 14,633. Any profession that had a 25-percent reduction in their essential workers would be screaming for help, but yet these men and women every day shoulder the responsibility and burden of moving the most planes in the history of the world, especially through this shutdown and seven weeks of uncertainty. So, we'll do what we do every day: we'll show up, we'll keep America safe, we'll keep the skies moving, and we're looking forward to getting back on track to the long-term commitment to hiring and training of the next-generation controllers, and fixing the equipment that is antiquated and needs to be done.

Senator MORAN. Mr. Daniels, you highlighted this subcommittee's and the full committee, and actually the Congress' efforts to engage and further employ air traffic controllers. Part of that involves training, as you mentioned, in Oklahoma City. What's the circumstances in the Academy in Oklahoma City with students who still—who want to be air traffic controllers? The Academy did not close during the shutdown, as I understand it, but were the number—were students there, and is there a line still waiting to become air traffic controllers?

Mr. DANIELS. There is still a line waiting. NACA absolutely commends Secretary Duffy, Administrator Bedford for finding a way to keep the Oklahoma City Academy open for our first time in history. It's also important to note that air traffic controllers not only took on the added stress and pressure, the fatigue that comes with the shutdown, the uncertainty, but they were also training the entire shutdown. But for our first time in history, we saw people start resigning out of the Academy saying, you know what? I can't afford to pass the Oklahoma City academy, move hundreds, if not thousands, of miles to one of the most high cost-of-living areas in America, which are near our major airports, to pick up a career in a profession that's not going to pay me and I have no idea when, and they started to resign. And not only their resignations, but also controllers in mid-career started resigning, saying, enough's enough. I have to go find a job that has more stability than this.

Senator MORAN. Mr. Viola, you probably represent the opportunity to talk about an area that's not necessarily thought about during the circumstances we've been through, and that's the certification process by which we advance aviation's technology and capabilities and we build and produce more airplanes to fill the fleet. Tell us in your words what it is that was not occurring during the shutdown that matters to the safety and well-being of the flying public, as well as what it means to our ability to compete in the global economy?

Mr. VIOLA. So, as you know, new technologies are certified to get onto aircraft, the ability to get those new projects into the FAA to

start that process to get them on board the aircraft, so the modernization of aircraft would be one thing. And then the fact that everything just kind of shifts and the rescheduling of the activities with the FAA to do those new projects, the new technology basis to be a leader in the aviation community.

Senator MORAN. Thank you. Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Daniels, you noted that for the first time in history, and you just said you commend Secretary Duffy and FAA Administrator for finding a way to keep the Air Traffic Controller Academy open and keep training. In your conversations with them during the shutdown, did you ask them to find a way to also pay air traffic controllers since they found a way to keep the Academy going?

Mr. VIOLA. I did not specifically have that request of them during it, but it was loud and clear that paying air traffic controllers is essential.

Senator DUCKWORTH. So, it was—you commend them for keeping the academies going, but you don't—you didn't actually ask them to pay the air traffic controllers. I mean, if DOD and if FAA can continue hiring and training air traffic controllers because of failing to do so with risk to imminent loss of life or loss of personal property, surely there's a case to be made for paying air traffic controllers from reprogrammed funds or even donations from industry. I mean, if DOD can use funds that Congress authorizes and appropriate for R&D and not salaries and expenses, along with accepting a billionaire's donation of over \$100 million to pay military men and women, what stops FAA from following suit and reprogramming funds from accounts like the Airport and Airways Trust Fund to pay air traffic controller salaries and—or solicit donations from industry? Did you have a conversation about using those funds to pay the air traffic controllers, which I would've supported?

Mr. VIOLA. I did not have a specific conversation as what you're referencing, but I'll put my request on record, from now on, in the future. I welcome any chance to pay air traffic controllers for the work that they're doing, and they should never go uncompensated for the work that's being done or used as a political pawn in this—in a political dispute.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Right. I think that's what's happening today, is that you're being used as a political pawn. When this hearing was advised, it was called the "Damage of the Democratic Shutdown." I have been the strongest supporter of air traffic controllers. I think you should have been paid. I think that we should have called up Senator Moran's bill with Senator Cruz's bill. We could have passed it, and you should have been paid. It is unconscionable that we had at least one death by suicide that I heard of an air traffic controller in the shutdown. This is not acceptable in our Nation, but what is happening today is political theater to use you guys as pawns to score points post-shutdown.

I would rather we be talking about what we need to do to get, for example, Mr. Sununu, the data that Secretary Duffy talked about that was forthcoming for why he wanted to—why we needed to do the slowdowns. I think we all would like to see that data. None of us have seen it. I think we should be talking about passing these pieces of legislation in a bipartisan way. We should not be

scoring political points, but we are here now. So, since we are here, I'm going to talk about why we had a shutdown in the first place, which is healthcare.

Let me just ask my—our witness, Mrs. Spickler, as a cancer survivor yourself, how do you feel about Republican proposals that would revive high-risk pools and largely seek to promote schemes that lower health insurance premiums by giving young and healthy Americans junk plans in exchange for permission to screw over Americans with preexisting conditions, disabilities, and other serious medical conditions?

Mrs. SPICKLER. Thank you, Senator Duckworth. I remember what it was like before the ACA was passed, and it was horrible. When I was in my 30s, I went twice without health insurance. I could not afford it. I was getting medication from Canada until the whole donut hole thing started, which—anyways, yes, and I don't agree with it because I lived it. This is my lived experience, and I don't want to be a political pawn either. What I am dealing with is just as important as air safety, and so I don't understand why it has to be so bipolar. Why can't it be both/and instead of either/or? They are equally important. They both need to be addressed, and stealing money from one to pay billionaires is not fair. That is—none of this is fair, and I don't even know if I'm going off topic or not, but I would—

Senator DUCKWORTH. No, you're very much on topic.

Mrs. SPICKLER. I did not—I could not—I had preexisting conditions, and I could not qualify for any kind of affordable plan. It was like \$1,200, and that was 30 years ago, a month.

Senator DUCKWORTH. You're right. We should not be pitting air traffic controllers against healthcare affordability for Americans, and that's not the purpose of this committee. The purpose of this committee is air—and the Subcommittee is air traffic safety, and that's what we should be focused on, so let's stop with the games. We can focus on what we need to do to move forward, but let's remember how we got here, but also remember who championed you—

Mrs. SPICKLER. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH.—during the FAA reauthorization. I did. I was the biggest supporter of air traffic controllers, and to come in here and act like you don't remember any of that is offensive to me. I yield back.

Senator MORAN. Senator Kim.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ANDY KIM,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW JERSEY**

Senator KIM. Thank you, Chairman. Mr. Daniels, thank you for your testimony and what you shared in terms of the struggles and the challenges that air traffic controllers and others faced. I had the chance to talk on the phone with some air traffic controllers from New Jersey and—during the shutdown, and I'll tell you, you know, they were—they were telling me just, you know, that they felt like they were pawns, is the words that they said. They felt like they were taken for granted. It was really hard hearing just the emotion in their voice, and I'll be honest with you, they were livid at what they were seeing in terms of Capitol Hill. I mean,

they were straight up telling me that why do they have to show up to work and not get paid when, frankly, the House of Representatives wasn't even in session for the entirety of the shutdown and Members of Congress are getting paid. And one thing that I kept hearing was this idea of feeling that, you know, Members of Congress, the President are getting paid, that we're playing with other people's chips, that we don't feel it ourselves, and this is something I felt very personally, too.

I was a career civil servant in the Federal Government. I worked through shutdowns before without getting paid, and I know what it's like to just feel like those that are on Capitol Hill don't care about what's happening to us. This is just a low political game for them, and that's why, you know, I always refuse to take my salary during shutdowns while I've been up here on the Hill, a small token of symbolism here, but one that I think is important. You said something that stuck out to me, and I appreciated it. You said, "No American should work without a paycheck," right, in your testimony?

Mr. DANIELS. Yes, sir, I did.

Senator KIM. Yes. So, look, I certainly agree with the others in this room that we should make sure that our air traffic controllers are continuing to get paid no matter what the circumstances are. But can I take from that comment of yours that you would support legislation that would ensure that all government employees can continue to get their paycheck regardless of the circumstances?

Mr. DANIELS. Thank you, Senator, for your question. Absolutely. Air traffic controllers and all Federal employees deserve to be paid.

Senator KIM. I think that's really important as we're talking this through, and, certainly, I understand the strains that air traffic controllers are facing. When I was an officer at the State Department, I know I had colleagues working in harm's way in Afghanistan and elsewhere that were not getting their paychecks, and it's just about duty. I mean, like, no one would tolerate a private company forcing workers to show up for work and saying you'll get your paycheck maybe some other time, and I think that that's something that I just hope we can keep in mind here.

Mr. Daniels, you also talked about how there has been a call for a long time for increased controller staffing. This is something I just hear year after year, I mean, and the challenges that we continue to face, and the shutdown certainly exposes that fragility. But we always—we saw in New Jersey as well that—some of the problems that we had with the radar scopes and other things earlier this year were causing challenges when it came to staffing because of just the difficulty and the strain that people were in, whether at the Philly TRACON or elsewhere.

So, I guess I just wanted to just hear from you, how do we try to build up and close that delta that you were talking about in terms of the staffing shortages? I know there are a number of ideas that have been out there, but can you really try to help us kind of articulate for the American people what are the things that we need to do to stop kicking the can down the road and actually be able to take steps to be able to build up the kind of resilience that we need when it comes to our air traffic controllers?

Mr. DANIELS. I appreciate the question, Senator Kim, and for the support of air traffic controllers and the modernization of air traffic. But when it specifically comes to the training of air traffic controllers, we often look for some quick fix when the real solution and the real answer is a long-term commitment to the hiring and training of the next generation air traffic controllers. And we're absolutely not taking a side, and we absolutely thank Senator Duckworth, the leadership of this committee for ensuring that that language prevails, and that that's what the standard is held today is that long-term commitment, and not trying to find another way around it. But it's also going to come from ensuring that we have the training, tools, and resources, which is also, again, in the FAA reauthorization bill, of the different simulators that reduces training time by up to 27 percent for our facilities. So, it's having that investment. The money's there. Now we actually have to be able to use it, and the government shutdown absolutely stopped and stalled that, but now we can get back on track.

Senator KIM. Yes, though, I mean, look, I—one thing I keep hearing over and over again in terms of the challenges of recruitment is about instability, and like I said, you know, I've experienced this firsthand when I was a civil servant. I was working there at the State Department in the Pentagon during the 2013 sequestration fight, you know, watching how the Republicans at that time were pushing these budget cuts and how that had years' worth of ramifications, so I'd just share that.

Mrs. Spickler, I don't have time to be—to ask a question, but I just wanted to say thank you for coming and sharing your story. It is a story, unfortunately, that I heard echoes of, exactly the same, across New Jersey. I will promise you, I will keep fighting for you, your family, for all of these families. Even though, you know, the shutdown's over, we know that the struggles that you and others are facing continue, so we're going to continue to get to work there. Thank you, and with that, I'll yield back.

Senator MORAN. Thank you. Senator Capito.

**STATEMENT OF HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM WEST VIRGINIA**

Senator CAPITO. Senator Breathless Capito over here. Thank you for being here, and I think really the last, I know they've—the last 6 or 7 weeks have been extremely miserable for you and the American public, and it's been miserable up here at the U.S. Senate, too. So, I don't know if that's any consolation, but it certainly is.

Let me ask you something that I think happens when things like this happen, which are obviously rare, but certainly air service in rural areas is so challenged. Service has been cut. I'll just say your flights are going out at 5 in the morning or coming in at 11 at night. And so, the fear, I think, is, as we head toward—when we look at shortages of air traffic controllers and other stresses and strains, I mean, how do you view this—I guess, Mr. Daniels, this would be for you. How do you view this from the air traffic control perspective in something like a shutdown or something where there's a slowdown in the economy? Where do you see the differences, the impacts between urban and rural America in terms

of air service and availabilities, and how do you all—how do your people look at that, your air traffic controllers?

Mr. DANIELS. Well, first, thank you for the question, Senator. The impact of the shutdown does one of many things. The disruption, the stress, the fatigue, the absolute uncertainty that it brings air traffic controllers to not be 100 percent focused on the job where they have to be perfect—they have to be 100 percent 100 percent of the time—that increases risk in our system and something that we continuously advocate for, and why we support Senator Moran's bill, Senator Cruz's bill to ensure that we're not part of these shutdowns in the future. But also, as far as the difference in markets, what you're getting to see is what we deal with every single day, and that's operate a system with less than 25 percent of its essential workforce, 3,800 certified controllers short, and on any given day, one absence, one person not being able to make it, additional stress and additional fatigue, absolutely impacts America in the flying public.

Senator CAPITO. Well, that kind of leads me to—thank you for that—my second question, and, Governor, it's nice to see you. Essential air service is what we rely on, not in all of our airports, but certainly several of them. Where do you see the—because we do rely so much on it, how important is that to your membership, Governor—

Mr. SUNUNU. That's huge, yes.

Senator CAPITO.—for essential air service?

Mr. SUNUNU. Sorry. No, it—

Senator CAPITO. Can you talk about that during the shutdown and how that had been impacted?

Mr. SUNUNU. Sure. So, the regional hub service, the system that we have with major carriers having hubs and then the regionals kind of pouring into there, as Mr. Daniels identified, some of the issues are around workforce, right? You want—you got to have the workforce, whether it's in the towers or the pilots or the training programs in those rural areas to support that. The aircraft themselves, they tend to be a little bit smaller. You got to make sure that there's investment in the technologies there. You know, as was identified, one of the biggest impacts of the shutdown were things weren't getting certified. Equipment and technologies weren't getting certified, and so that's critical. You don't want to leave those regional and those rural areas behind.

I can say that when it did come to the area of cancellations, you know, that was a tough conversation. You know, we're always talking to the FAA. We have a great collaboration and a great working relationship with them. When it came to some of those preliminary—looking preliminarily at what these cancellations would mean, to their credit, the FAA said, look, you can't just—we're not just shutting down rural areas because they're a little less, you know, not—

Senator CAPITO. Profitable.

Mr. SUNUNU.—highlights, if you will. So, they really took care to make sure and understanding that while these impacts were going to be big across the country, they had to be evenly distributed. It couldn't just be the main—you know, the main lines get to be maintained and the regionals get hit.

Senator CAPITO. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Mr. SUNUNU. So, the shutdown was tough, but I think everyone tried to make every effort to make sure that where pullback had to happen, it happened at—happened evenly with an understanding that rural areas always kind of are the—are the first ones to get hit, and they wanted to be cognizant of that.

Senator CAPITO. OK. Let me just throw this up to whoever wants to answer, one thing I was sort of wondering about. You know, we put—we put a lot of money into modernizing the air traffic control, the technologies behind it. I mean, we're way behind on this, but we did put a lot of money in the One Big Beautiful Bill to get a good head start on that. Do you think this testimony or the impacts on our air service and our aviation systems, if we had that system fully operational, the new system that we want, would there be any difference in the conversation we're having today? And I guess Mr.—I can't see him.

Mr. DANIELS. I'll take the first stab at it, Senator, yes.

Senator CAPITO. Mr. Daniels, why don't you take that? Yes.

Mr. DANIELS. Thank you very much. I think the number one impact you see is the backbone of that system is the hardworking men and women, the true American patriots that do that.

Senator CAPITO. I get that. I get that.

Mr. DANIELS. And yes, we would absolutely see a difference because if we had a full workforce with modernized equipment, we would not see near as many disruptions and delays.

Senator CAPITO. OK. So, question being is—does that system work without a full—a full amount of people working on it?

Mr. DANIELS. No.

Senator CAPITO. No.

Mr. DANIELS. No system will overcome the hardworking men and women.

Senator CAPITO. OK. Good. Thank you. Thank you very much. Oh, did you want to say something?

Mr. SUNUNU. No, I would—no, I would just add that it's all about efficiency, allowing those technologies, the speed at which controllers could potentially get trained, the ubiquitous nature where one tower doesn't have one set—one system—

Senator CAPITO. Yes.

Mr. SUNUNU.—and another tower has another system. It would allow, you know, folks to move around in an emergency situation, so that first \$12 billion is great. The next \$19 billion is critical, and the technologies you're going to see in this country are absolutely amazing and going to make the whole system work, not for the air—just the airlines, work for 350 million Americans that rely on it and all the air traffic controllers that are completely strained by it.

Senator CAPITO. Yes, and I would add, really, the world because people are flying here and around here all the time. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Senator MORAN. Senator Capito, thank you. I'd highlight for our committee members and maybe the audience that we are working to have a hearing in November that involves the Secretary of Transportation and/or the FAA Administrator to talk about the amount of money that's been made available, the amount of—lack

of money that's been available, and to see where we are in the modernization effort. And we hope—we were—we were unsuccessful during the shutdown to get the Federal employee witnesses to be here and were postponing—had postponed that hearing and hoping it occurs in November. Senator Sheehy.

**STATEMENT OF HON. TIM SHEEHY,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM MONTANA**

Senator SHEEHY. Thanks for being here, everyone. You know, we all are focused on the airlines, generally, ATC slowdowns and airline delays, and how that derives, you know, economically from that. But I think another piece of these—of the manning shortage that came from the shutdown but also were impacted writ large is our FAA oversight, PMOs, DPEs, folks who work within the FAA structure that allow small operators, like 135 operators, 137, 133, the folks who are doing organ transportation, who are doing air ambulance, medical evacuation, who are crop dusting, who are doing aviation maintenance in a Part 145 repair station. They require access to their FAA oversight bodies and their local FISDOs and ACOs to continue operating for pilot checks, for maintenance inspections. And when that oversight is not available, either those companies are operating under an extended period of a waiver, or they're just not getting the oversight and safety inspection that is required by law. So, I'd be curious as to your thoughts on that and what you're hearing from operators, either as manufacturers, Mr. Viola, or smaller 135/137 operators in the field?

Mr. VIOLA. Well, thank you for that question, and I'll take the first run at it. Well, certainly the oversight of the designated pilot examiners as well as the DARs out there that are trying to get new certification or STCs that's out there delayed some of that, getting to the field. And then, you know, with the FISDOs having to, you know, try to figure out what it was they can do, what it was that was important to get back from the leadership, and getting that out to an employee has been difficult. The challenges of the workforce, it fits back into the workforce of the FAA and not having that stable funding and not having to know—you know, what is going on with the training in other areas. So, that's why we certainly support any action that will pay the FAA during any of these government shutdowns so that we can keep that oversight going, so we can keep the momentum going. And as was mentioned, you know, the modernization that we're trying to do with \$12-and-a-half-million—billion dollars now, we still look forward to trying to get that whole system in place with the additional \$30 billion so that everything that we do here in the United States can operate more effectively and efficiently for the taxpayers.

Senator SHEEHY. Anything to add?

Mr. SUNUNU. The only thing I would add is, you know, when we were talking about the aspects of what happened during the shutdown, when we talk about whether it's the cancellations or the delays, to your point, I think very importantly, the new way of healthcare in this country is everything from using broadband and telehealth, to getting your pharmaceuticals shipped to you, to getting your home healthcare, your home dialysis, whatever it might be. So, when we see pullback, that happens to our cargo carriers

that we represent, the FedExes, the UPSes, the Atlas, that means that those delays happen. And as a lot of folks know, just a day or two delay on things that have to be overnighted for healthcare in the home, it's not just out of the hospital anymore. When you—these things have huge effects on how healthcare is delivered nowadays, and just an important aspect that it wasn't just the passengers that were affected. The carriers that are, you know, delivering organs, delivering people to vital healthcare, you know, hospital to hospital, but also that every day use, UPS, they all had to pull back to those same levels, and it hurt. It caused a lot of delays everywhere.

Senator SHEEHY. Well, and there has already been a challenged infrastructure with regard to the aviation employment sphere. I mean, we can't get enough pilots, mechanics, controllers. This is pre-shutdown. This has nothing to do with shutdown. We've already had a challenge in making sure we have appropriate manning, both in the FAA as an Agency, but also across the board and in the private industry. And then when something like this happens and kind of throwing fuel on the fire, especially in rural areas with Central Air Service access, and where we have towers that are at half manning across a lot of the mountain West as those towns are growing so fast and air travel's growing there. So, thank you for your comments. I appreciate your time today. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Senator MORAN. Senator Sheehy, thank you. We're pleased to have the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, Senator—

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARIA CANTWELL,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM WASHINGTON**

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you.

Senator MORAN. I started to say "Capito." Senator Cantwell.

[Laughter.]

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you and to the Ranking Member for holding this important hearing, and for our witnesses being here. We have obviously made air traffic control staffing a major priority in the last Aviation bill, and we are continuing to make it a major priority. I want an FAA who does slow down traffic when they think it's necessary, as exhibited by the very unfortunate tragedy that we had at DCA, so I hope that we'll continue to close safety gaps, and I hope we will continue to invigorate air traffic controllers.

I think the question that we have, maybe for you, Mr. Sununu or Mr. Daniels, last year when we required the FAA to set a maximum hiring target through Fiscal Year 2028 to maximize training capacity for controllers, it would require the FAA to do this for 5 years through 2033. Do you support and agree that we must ensure that FAA continues its maximum control or hiring for at least the next 10 consecutive years, and that the FAA is then in a better position to offset retirements? So, either Mr. Daniels first and then Mr. Sununu?

Mr. DANIELS. First, great to see you, Senator, and thank you for the support, especially when it comes to FAA reauthorization and the SAFE Act in the shared airspace. We would truly appreciate that. As far as it goes, yes, it absolutely needs to be the long-term

commitment to the hiring and training of the next generation of air traffic controllers. And that 10 years is critical for us to not only modernize the system, but ensure that air traffic controllers have a full staffing complement to take on the next generation of aviation, which is going to be through autonomous vehicles, drones, and otherwise. And that's going to be a new challenge that presents itself, but this workforce will be ready enough for it as long as the commitment stays there to ensure that they have all the bodies that are needed.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you. Mr. Sununu?

Mr. SUNUNU. And I would just 100 percent, I mean, and making sure that they're funded and paid, that should be the low bar. I think making sure that you don't disincentivize people from coming into the industry, as Mr. Daniel was highlighting earlier, not just when seeing folks walk away from the academy during the shut-down. How do you go into a high school and encourage a—someone who's about to graduate to get excited about aviation, get excited about the industry, when the headline every single day is you don't get paid. So, I think the concern is not just did we see negative effects over the last 6 weeks, but that is going to have, unfortunately, negative reverberations unless we jump on top of the messaging, we ensure the American public that not just, you know, the appropriation bill that we're looking at moves forward, but Senator Moran's bill is real, everyone gets behind it, we make sure that this just cannot happen again because otherwise, the uncertainty added to the system could be really detrimental for years to come.

Senator CANTWELL. I have two more questions for you. So, one, did you—did the airlines comply with what the Secretary requested?

Mr. SUNUNU. Oh, yes. Look, the airlines made every good-faith effort. In the—in the early—in those first days—Friday, Saturday, Sunday—I think they had to meet a 4-percent cancellation. I think on Sunday we were over 10—

Senator CANTWELL. Well, do you think—

Mr. SUNUNU.—because it was such a logistics nightmare.

Senator CANTWELL. Well, do you think there's data that shows that—there's data that shows that?

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes, there were over 10 percent. I think—I mean, I can pick individual—OK. I think Delta at one point hit 16 percent the following Monday, something like that, and what they realized is, you know what? If the—if they had to hit, let's say, 4 or 6 percent—I think Monday it hit 6 percent—they realized, OK, we're going to plan for a few percent below that. Why? Because it could be a maintenance issue or a weather issue, just the natural other cancellations. They had to—

Senator CANTWELL. Yes.

Mr. SUNUNU.—they realized they had to kind of build into the calculus so they didn't over cancel. And then as the—if I may, as the week went on, it wasn't just we'll take that one flight down. Well, when you take the flight from Boston to Washington down, that means that Washington to Kansas City, Kansas City to LA, and LA back to Chicago flights can't happen either. So, moving the assets around, consolidating those customers and the crews because there are laws and regulations and protections around those

crews. A crew from a 737 can't jump on a 787. The flight crew from that flight can't just jump on that one because they need a break. They need—

Senator CANTWELL. Yes.

Mr. SUNUNU. So, it got very complex.

Senator CANTWELL. Yes, it's very complex, but I am—I am interested in some analysis of this and some information because I'm—I think we might've also found some optimization of the system, and I do think that we push sometimes to get maximum, like the DCA. I'm sure we'll hear from NTSB in January about the flow of traffic into DCA the night of the crash, and was there too much flow in and should it have been slower, and then the warning bells that, basically, air traffic controllers had said went off for months and months and months unheeded because there was too much going on. So, I'm—I am curious if we ended up actually having, like, optimization. Like, if we had more on-time flight arrivals because we weren't pushing it. We were actually—the system can be optimized at a certain level of service delivery. Now, that isn't—that isn't a moneymaker for—that isn't, like, maximizing profits to the nth degree, but there probably is a system that is calibrated in the right way to make sure that you have more on-time performance and certainly on the safety side.

I want to ask you about—you guys, A4A, and I know you're new at this and we welcome you in that capacity. We are encouraged by the Department of Transportation reviewing unnecessary burden regulations exceeding their authority. I'm talking about this issue of our authority directed to DOT to take care of secondary rules—secondary costs on hotels and meals.

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes.

Senator CANTWELL. What happened is the Southwest meltdown left my constituents—the Rainier Beach basketball team, Coach Bethea, and his wife had to pay thousands of dollars of out-of-pocket expenses. You remember the meltdown that winter, and they were stuck in Las Vegas, had to pay all these out-of-pocket expenses, so we said let's not have this happen again, and let's come up with rules for secondary cost in these situations. And so, I think the administration is trying to scrap that consumer product rule. I'm saying that's a bad idea. You need to do it, and—but it seems like A4A is cheerleading them.

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes. So, if we're talking about the—two things. Number one, I do want to address your—is there a system that where everything can be optimized. There absolutely is, and it costs \$31.5 billion, and we appreciate the first \$12-and-a-half billion. The technologies with that next \$19 billion are going to be absolutely phenomenal. You're talking about efficiency, more Americans traveling safer. It'll be amazing, and so I think everyone appreciates that.

On the deregulation aspects, yes, there's no doubt some regulations have come into play in the last 4 years or so, kind of prior to 2025, that, frankly, didn't make any sense, not for the industry, but even for the consumer. They were punitive. They would've raised costs on the consumer. There were instances where the industry was going to have to pay tens of thousands dollars for act-of-God type situations. And we simply said, look, every law and

every rule that's on the books, we always comply to on the consumer protection side. We never overlooked that.

Senator CANTWELL. But do you—do you want—did you want this rolled back is what I'm asking. Are you asking—this rule that came into effect. We wrote it. We all wrote it here and said, put this in the bill that—have the administration think of these secondary costs—

Mr. SUNUNU. Mm-hmm.

Senator CANTWELL.—and have a rulemaking on it because it is complex. I mean, what happened was far more than just a winter meltdown. Some airlines were better prepared to address the concerns of constituents and give them information about when they might be able to get on a flight and how they might be able to get home, and then other airlines were very ill prepared because they never invested in the technology.

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes.

Senator CANTWELL. And that was the frustration, so.

Mr. SUNUNU. So, I would simply say—yes, so I think the concern is having those rules in place is very important. Making sure we're not creating one-size-fits-all structures based on that one winter storm, which was devastating. As you pointed out, some airlines did it very well. Some airlines didn't. There was a lot of complexity in it. We just want to make sure that the rules are there and they're—they fit the need—

Senator CANTWELL. Yes.

Mr. SUNUNU.—of the moment, and they're not so broad based that they crush the consumer with higher costs.

Senator CANTWELL. If I could, Mr. Chairman, one more.

Senator MORAN. Senator Cantwell.

Senator CANTWELL. I don't see any of my colleagues waiting in line here on either side, so thank you. We have a bunch of people here with us today, and we've tried to deal with this issue two or three times, and it's really frustrating. The people who are ramp workers at airports clean our planes, they help with the security of the system, they are part of the aviation system, we tried during COVID to help them and met with huge opposition, even though we worked very hard in about 25 days to come up with a plan to help the airline industry survive during COVID. We tried in the last FAA authorization bill to also resolve the issue, and the issue is these people, they're not falling through the cracks when it comes to cleaning the planes and servicing our airports, and taking people in wheelchairs and getting them to locations. They're not falling. They're doing their job, but everybody acts like they are an island where they just appeared somewhere. They're not. They're part of this ecosystem. They are part of the aviation ecosystem, and they deserve to have healthcare. I do not want them coming on a plane sick. The whole point of getting on the plane and trying to make it not an unhealthy environment, why do you want the plane cleaned by people who are sick?

So, will you commit to work with me to find a solution to resolve this issue and help us get some compensation for the healthcare workers? Only people at the airport. Everybody else—flight attendants, stewards, people who work in the coffee shop—everybody else in this entire system has healthcare but these people. And every-

body dodges it because they think that it's not their problem, but they are part of the delivery system and they deserve healthcare. Will you work with me on this?

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes. Look, in terms of the healthcare issue, obviously it's a giant issue, and it just doesn't affect the airline industry. It affects 350 million Americans, of course. So, but I'm here to—I'm not—I'm here to represent the airlines and making sure that the airlines are safe, they're moving on time, that we're—

Senator CANTWELL. The air—

Mr. SUNUNU.—we don't get caught in the political side of things, and not the airlines, that the American public doesn't get caught on the political side of things, but those discussions have to happen. Those solutions have to be brought to bear on the healthcare section.

Senator CANTWELL. It's not—it's not the political side. They are part of the—a plane can't just come and land without somebody cleaning it, OK?

Mr. SUNUNU. Sure.

Senator CANTWELL. The airport and that sector work together to try to have the security team, the cleaning team, the maintenance team, everybody have a robust system. So, I think what happens here is everybody points the finger to somebody else that, oh, they're our contract workers—so they're our contract workers, so we don't have to provide healthcare, and—

Mr. SUNUNU. Well, I would say, if I may, for those workers with—they obviously don't work directly for the airlines per se, but if they're our contractors or they—

Senator CANTWELL. They work—they are contracted—they are contracted through airlines.

Mr. SUNUNU. And—

Senator CANTWELL. So, that's the issue, and then the contractors don't deliver the care, don't deliver access.

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes, and I would look to their unions as well. I mean, a lot of them are represented by unions, and I would imagine that they need to make sure that they're incorporating that. But yes, we'll—look, we're part of the big ecosystem, and we know we're the big dog, so.

Senator CANTWELL. So, you will work with me?

Mr. SUNUNU. Absolutely, yes.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you. That's what I wanted to hear. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MORAN. Senator Duckworth, anything further? I have a couple of questions.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Well, if you're going to do a second round, I'll do some as well.

Senator MORAN. If you want to, you can.

Senator DUCKWORTH. OK.

Senator MORAN. Please.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you.

Senator MORAN. You go, and I'll wrap up.

Senator DUCKWORTH. OK. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the days leading up to the Trump administration issuing an emergency order mandating a significant reduction in flights, separate and apart from restrictions triggered by ATC staffing short-

ages, the Trump administration claimed that this order was dictated by data. As Secretary Duffy stated, “The data would dictate what we are going to do. Data driven. Safety driven.” Now, the irony is that under normal circumstances, nobody would cheer louder than me for evidence of FAA changing its culture to be more proactive in using real-time safety data and, most importantly, making tough decisions to prevent deadly incidents. That is why the Trump administration’s failure to transparently disclose the data underlying its emergency order, combined with Secretary Duffy’s overt threats to ramp up flight restrictions unless Democrats rolled over and just voted for whatever plan Republicans proposed, was and remains deeply disappointing. It fails to strengthen confidence in good government, and the American people are understandably suspicious of a DOT and FAA that does not show its work.

I have a—I have a fifth grader who I work with every day saying, “Honey, I know you’re doing long division, but you need to show your work. Otherwise, your teacher thinks you use a calculator.” Right now, frankly, the FAA’s failure to respond to basic information requests from my office and the ranking member’s office over the past few weeks does nothing to dispel accusations that the Trump administration weaponized our aviation industry against American people to score partisan political points. In justifying its emergency order, FAA noted that voluntary safety reports submitted in October indicated that operators, presumably many employees of the air carriers that A4A represents, had concerns about the safety of the National Airspace System, despite the mitigation measures that had been put in place. Governor Sununu, did any airlines proactively restrict flight volumes independent of staffing triggers or even preemptively contact FAA to recommend that the Agency consider emergency action along the lines of the emergency order that the FAA eventually issued? I know you’re new to the organization.

Mr. SUNUNU. I don’t believe that any of the carriers actually said we’re going to cancel flights because of this, but to be clear, the carriers, Airlines for America, and the FAA were talking constantly about data, about what they’re seeing, staffing triggers, hotspots. And I would note that what was interesting about this shutdown from the first day on October 1, all the way to the end, there was never consistency. It wasn’t like the Northeast has a problem. It was one day it was in the West, one day it was in Newark, one day it was Burbank, one day it was Nashville, so there was—it was very hard to manage. It was almost like playing whack-a-mole, but at no time did they—did the carriers say we have to take more flights out. They said we just need to put more mitigation strategies in to ensure safety, which they did, resulting in the delays, and that’s why the cancellations were well under 1 percent for, you know, the bulk of October until the pressures really built.

Senator DUCKWORTH. So, in that emergency order, FAA stated the Agency had “observed evidence of increased stress in the National Air Traffic System and aviation safety data, particularly 40 high-traffic airports,” which I think is what you’re talking—speaking to.

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Unfortunately, FAA did not provide further insight into precisely what evidence and what specific metrics it used to determine that emergency order was required to immediately halt flights at high-traffic airports. Did you—did they—did your members provide any data to FAA, or did they share any data to you behind that—

Mr. SUNUNU. Well, the biggest piece—yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH.—especially at those 40 because I haven't seen it, and I've been requesting it.

Mr. SUNUNU. Well, the biggest piece of data is incredibly obvious: all the staffing callouts.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Well, I don't—

Mr. SUNUNU. The fact that was increasing day by day by day.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Right.

Mr. SUNUNU. The fact that you had—I mean, Nick, you could probably give more accurate data. On Halloween alone, the staffing triggers and callouts from just the morning to the afternoon skyrocketed, and then sometimes we'd see that go down, but Saturday was brutal. Sunday went down. Monday, Tuesday were—so the data, at least that we were looking at, were those staffing triggers and callouts, and we were watching that hour by hour, and post-Halloween, it really never went down. It was really, really tough. Beyond that, I mean, I'd have to refer to the FAA for any other data points, but those are the ones that we specifically were looking at—

Senator DUCKWORTH. Did you get the—

Mr. SUNUNU.—and then there were the close calls.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Where did you—and that data came to you from the FAA, or that was—how did you get the callout data on how many air traffic controllers—

Mr. SUNUNU. We get that data literally hourly. There's a couple different services that we use.

Senator DUCKWORTH. OK.

Mr. SUNUNU. So, we get—morning, I can see what they call staffing triggers—

Senator DUCKWORTH. Mm-hmm.

Mr. SUNUNU.—and then that gets—again, Nick can probably give you more information, but that can get to actual potential shutdowns where the actual towers just don't become sustainable to be manned in terms of landing and not landing, and we had a couple instances there. And if I may, shortly before the FAA came to us and said, look, we may need to talk about forced cancellations. You had three or four close calls on the taxiways, physical close calls, so that was clearly of concern. And I'm not here to defend the FAA, they can defend themselves, but I think they said, look—to the point that was made earlier—we want to be preventative here. We're not going to wait for a tragedy or a crisis to happen. Let's be preventative and make sure we can keep the airspace viable. Let's not be like, you know, frankly, the rest of government and wait for a tragedy before we do something. They said, we're going to get ahead of it.

And that was really tough for the airlines, but if you talk to the CEOs, they all say it was the right thing to do. Being safe and smart is always best, and staying ahead of it and being proactive,

and the number—those number of callouts were huge. Other data, I'd have to just refer you to the FAA.

Senator DUCKWORTH. My problem is there's, like, all this different callout data. I've been trying to get ahold of all of the data, and if you guys were getting specific data from the FAA, I want to see that because FAA has not provided it. At one point, Secretary Duffy said he was getting 56 retirements a day. That was the number he put out—

Mr. SUNUNU. Mm-hmm.

Senator DUCKWORTH.—which I've not seen that backed up anywhere, and if it is, then I would need to know that. I'm just deeply concerned that there is a nebulous term of the data, and we don't know what that is. And if we want to look toward the future and do better the next time and do better even now, we need to know what that data is, and we should be sharing that data. And it concerns—deeply concerns me that FAA is not actually sharing the same set of data with everyone so that we're operating off of the same sheet of music.

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes, the only thing we really looked at was those calls. I don't mean to put Nick on the spot, but there are a couple different areas where I think you can see the actual number of calls and the triggers. We subscribe to a system that gives us that data, but.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Right, but yet—

Mr. SUNUNU. Yes.

Senator DUCKWORTH.—Secretary Duffy put out a number that was not consistent.

Mr. SUNUNU. Mmm. Thank you.

Senator MORAN. Thank you, Senator. Just a couple of things to wrap up, at least in my thinking. You all have been kind to mention the bill I first—I first introduced in 2019 in an earlier shutdown. This is not a unique circumstance. We've been through this before. Is there anything in that legislation—maybe I should explain for our audience that the Aviation Funding Stability Act is legislation that seeks to insulate the FAA in the event that there's a government shutdown. The bill authorizes the FAA to continue to draw from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund during a lapse in appropriations with no General Fund contributions. The AATF generates sufficient revenues independently to sustain all Agency programs, including air traffic control operations, staffing and training, aircraft certification, and other essential functions. Any of you have suggestions of how we might improve that legislation? Are there things that—and if you don't have an answer today, you're welcome to provide an answer later, but if we are able to pursue the passage of this legislation, what are we missing or what have we erred in, in any way?

Mr. DANIELS. Chairman Moran, we'll obviously work with you and Senator Duckworth on any changes to the language, but we fully support it as written, anything or any legislation that prevents air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals from not getting paid during a government shutdown. So, we're in

full support of it as written currently, and if there are any other suggestions, we'll make sure they get to your office.

Senator MORAN. Thank you.

Mr. SUNUNU. If I—if I may add one thing, it's terrific. It's awesome. We really hope it passes, like, tomorrow, but, and maybe even out of the—out of this committee's wheelhouse, understandably, TSA, CBP are also very important, and, as was noted, other aspects that might not fall directly within the FAA structure, but are part of that National Aviation Ecosystem.

Senator MORAN. Good reminder. We need everyone at work. Mr. Viola?

Mr. VIOLA. Sir, I would say we strongly support the Aviation Funding Stability Act.

Senator MORAN. I wasn't really looking for that compliment, but it's helpful to be able to say that you do—

[Laughter.]

Senator MORAN.—and I appreciate that. You have both—you have highlighted two things: that legislation and then the importance of THUD and its appropriations process. I'd like to give you another opportunity as we are trying, as we speak, to clear holds that various senators have on appropriation bills. And the effort is to bring the defense appropriation bill to the floor with a vote this week, and then allow for other bills to be added, including the transportation appropriation bill. Tell us why it's important to pass an appropriation bill for the Department of Transportation in the arenas in which you work or represent?

Mr. DANIELS. We'll start with the Modern Skies Coalition, as we're a part of it and has done a well—a great job of articulating the issues. Secretary Duffy has gone out as well talking about the need for the changes to staffing and modernization. We share many of the same components and the same vision. The true answers that America is looking for, the American flying public, are these long-term commitments in these bills, and that they are bipartisan and that we're working together, and that are supported by the entire aviation community and not just by one group, is that we're all coming together saying what makes this system better. And that's the true, I would say, value and importance of what's happening right now is you have an entire community speaking in unison of what is needed instead of just one entity politicking for themselves. I think anything that is focused on continuing to ensure that that voice is moved forward is the true answer that's going to bring the solutions that the American people want and deserve.

Mr. SUNUNU. I would only add, it's obviously immensely critical in providing that confidence in the system. I think because the shutdown was so big, so impactful to the American public, folks are going to be watching. Maybe appropriations bills don't take headlines typically, but I think come mid-January, folks are going to be watching and saying is this an industry we can count on, not just in terms of booking travel, but for the workforce aspects, all the things that Nick has been talking about and God bless his teams for hitting on. We want to encourage that recruitment, and it will, at a minimum, keep some confidence into the system.

I would—the one argument—I'm not arguing against it by any means—is that it only goes until maybe mid-20-2026, something like that. So, we're going to be back in this pickle again a little bit, which is why your—I'll call it your follow-on bill on aviation funding is so critical because it really makes sure that regardless of which side, what the politics are today or 10 years from now, the aviation system in itself aren't held hostage to it. So, it's—for us, it's really about instilling that confidence for both the consumer and, more importantly, for the workforce that we need to keep coming into the system.

Mr. VIOLA. So, the government employee, and, of course, for our sector, the aviation employee, the FAA, you know, the year has been very distracting to try to get work done with the FAA. I think the stability that the workforce needs, a long-term stability that you've heard here, not just, OK, we're going to make it now to January 30, but they need to know that they are going to get paid, that they have jobs to do, that can actually dig into these certification issues that my members need to get this new technology on the aircraft to make the system safer. The Modern Skies Initiative that we're all members of, you know, we want to see a great system out there that—that's able to support the new increased capacity, not reduced capacity that we had to show we can do here during the shutdown, but we want to get the EV tools of the future going. We want to get these new aircraft that serve the rural communities, the new capabilities that don't need the longer runways. So, there's so much activity right now with aviation that, you know, we want that momentum, and the passage of this bill right now, I think, would be key for investment in the workforce of the future.

Senator MORAN. Thank you. I'll express those views to my colleagues. I know that you will as well.

Mr. DANIELS. Senator Moran, if I could add just one thing—

Senator MORAN. Mr. Daniels.

Mr. DANIELS.—since we're talking about those bills and what's moving through in the support from them. I'd be remiss—it was brought up on this panel about another air traffic controller who took their life and also about the mental health bill for aviation and the aviation professionals and the archaic medical system that remains in getting, you know, aviators and air traffic controllers true help. That is something else that is a must-pass bill and along with the appropriations that are—is going to go a long way for finally bringing this workforce up to the standards that are needed in getting them the help in advance of them taking their own lives.

Senator MORAN. What's missing in doing that?

Mr. DANIELS. The support of finally getting it passed through. It's out there, it's moving, and we're looking for everyone to support it.

Senator MORAN. Thank you. I offer my condolences to the air traffic control community and the individuals involved in that death. It is unfortunate sometimes the circumstances of a tragedy is what motivates us to do our jobs better. The January 29 is a circumstance of mine, and I know that the families of the—of the—those who died in that crash are in constant contact and encouragement to Members of Congress, including me, about the importance of moving forward on the air traffic safety plan. And we will

do our part, and it's a reminder that you just gave us about things need to be long term. It's not just fixing a problem for the moment but needs consistent attention and consistent appropriations and financial support, and I appreciate that reminder.

It's always been my practice to give the witnesses of a hearing I chair the opportunity to say anything that they didn't have a chance to say that they now thought of, they wish they'd have said. I find myself in that circumstance often, and maybe something I said that I wish I wouldn't have, and you can retract something if you'd like. But anybody want to make certain that there's something included in the record that they feel like they need to now say?

Mr. DANIELS. I'd like to start with one thing. First, thank you for having us. Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to talk about the issues. I think what this has highlighted and this shutdown has shown in the aviation world is how fragile the system is, but there are some terms that get thrown around, and I would say quite loosely: the terms of "calling out." Air traffic controllers have an extremely high record for showing up in the emergencies and crises of this country—September 11, a pandemic, two of the longest government shutdowns in history—and air traffic controllers showed up and stepped up day in and day out, but the term of art keeps continues to be "they're calling in sick."

They were calling in with no money. They were calling in with not being able to put gas in their car. They were calling in with not being able to pay for childcare. Those are real issues, real Americans, real patriots that are doing everything they can. They don't want to see that burden on another air traffic controller. So, while the term of art may be "air traffic controllers are calling out," it's not in protest. We absolutely condemn any coordinated efforts to call out, and the reasons that you saw it in different locations around the country is because you—what you can't pinpoint is when somebody's life situation and money situation and they're going to run out of it, or when the stress, the pressure, and the fatigue of being perfect absolutely crushes them that day, and they need to take a moment before reporting to duty to just say, well, I'll give it my best. Air traffic controllers don't have the option to give it their best. They have the duty to be perfect, and anything that we can do to support them through this bill and not allowing them to be subjected as a political pawn, again, we absolutely support, we absolutely endorse, and we absolutely need.

Senator MORAN. Thank you, Mr. Daniels. Mr. Sununu?

Mr. SUNUNU. No, I would just say thank you and thank you for the timeliness. I mean, we're just on the heels of it, and so the fact that you're moving so promptly is—instills a lot of confidence.

Senator MORAN. Mr. Viola, we were concerned—when we scheduled the hearing, we perhaps expected that maybe the shutdown was still continuing and had some thought about whether the hearing still had merit after the shutdown concluded, and my conclusion was it did have merit so that we could learn from circumstances. Mr. Viola, anything?

Mr. VIOLA. Yes. Well, thank you very much for having us here today. I would like to say, you know, the Modern Skies Coalition and getting the money now, I mean, my time in the FAA, 2015

when we were trying to work forward to get—to keep being a leader in aviation and being able to have these new vehicles that service society better. So, keeping that momentum going with the \$12-and-a-half billion and getting the additional funding would be great.

Senator MORAN. Who do I call now, Mr. Viola, that—when I want something—some certification, some new rule and regulation, some statutory deadline to be met at the FAA?

Mr. VIOLA. At the FAA?

Senator MORAN. Yes.

Mr. VIOLA. Call the Administrator.

Senator MORAN. Oh, of course.

[Laughter.]

Senator MORAN. I was hoping that you were still going to intercede on my behalf.

Mr. VIOLA. Oh, you could call me. I absolutely would do my best to work behind the scenes as well.

Senator MORAN. Yes, sir. Mrs. Spickler, thank you. Your maiden testimony to Congress, I assume, and thank you very much for being here. Anything you'd like to make sure that we hear before I conclude this hearing?

Mrs. SPICKLER. I thank you again for the opportunity to tell my story and to be heard.

Senator MORAN. Thank you for your willingness to tell us. I got to find some magic words in a script.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Oh, I have to read them items I'd like to—

Senator MORAN. OK. Yes, Senator Duckworth.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Yes. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to request unanimous consent the following documents be entered into the hearing record: original statement of April Barrett, President of Service Employees International Union; a September 24, 2025 letter from Kansas Healthcare Providers to the Kansas congressional delegation in support of extending enhanced premium tax credits; and a September 2025 Urban Institute and Commonwealth Fund Health Policy Brief titled, "4.8 Million People Will Lose Coverage if 20—in 2026 if Enhanced Premium Tax Credits Expire."

Senator MORAN. Without objection, those documents will be entered into the Committee's record.

Senator DUCKWORTH. Yes.

[The information referred to follows:]

Contact:

SEIU National Media

Issued November 9, 2025

**SEIU'S VERRETT: WORKING PEOPLE MADE CLEAR THROUGHOUT THE SHUTDOWN THAT HEALTHCARE IS A PRIORITY—WE WON'T BACK DOWN NOW**

*WASHINGTON, DC—Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President April Verrett released the following statement today after the Senate took a procedural vote clearing the way to end the government shutdown:*

"I'm proud of how working people showed up across the longest government shutdown in our Nation's history to demand that Congress protect affordable healthcare for every American. But unfortunately, Republican leaders showed that they would

rather jeopardize people's health and punish Federal workers than make billionaires pay taxes.

Now that the shutdown is ending, Federal workers will get paychecks again. But this weak deal is no cause for celebration. Millions of working families of all backgrounds will now see their healthcare costs skyrocket as ACA tax credits expire. Federally contracted workers are still not guaranteed backpay.

We won't back down until Congress takes action to resolve our healthcare crisis and ensures that every federal worker receives backpay. Working people don't fold—we fight forward.”

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September 24, 2025

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
United States Senate  
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Marshall  
United States Senate  
479A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tracey Mann  
U.S. House of Representatives  
344 Cannon House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Derek Schmidt  
U.S. House of Representatives  
1223 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Sharice Davids  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2435 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ron Estes  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2234 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**Subject: Protect Access to Affordable Healthcare for Kansans**

Dear Senator Moran, Senator Marshall, Representative Mann, Representative Schmidt, Representative Davids, and Representative Estes,

As Kansas healthcare providers on the frontlines of patient care, we urge you to take immediate action to extend the enhanced premium tax credits set to expire at the end of the year. Without congressional action, tens of thousands of Kansans will lose access to affordable health coverage.

These enhanced premium tax credits currently help over 160,000 Kansans afford health insurance through the individual marketplace—providing peace of mind, access to care and financial stability. If allowed to expire, families across our state—especially in rural areas—could lose their coverage or face impossible premium hikes.

September 24, 2025

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According to the Kansas Hospital Association, letting these credits expire would result in:

- A **77% average increase** in out-of-pocket premiums for those currently receiving assistance;
- A premium hike of **over \$2,500 per year** for a Kansas family of four making \$64,000 a year;
- An **increase of more than \$18,000 annually** for a 60-year-old couple making \$82,800 a year.

These increases would make insurance unaffordable for many, potentially leaving tens of thousands of Kansans without coverage. A recent report<sup>1</sup> estimates that if the subsidies are not extended, the uninsured rate in Kansas would increase by 32%, making it the 8th highest state increase in the nation.

As more Kansans lose coverage, hospitals will face rising levels of uncompensated care—placing even greater strain on a system already stretched thin. This is especially true for rural hospitals, many of which are already operating on razor-thin margins and serve as the only access point for care in their communities.

We are not alone in this concern. We join other hospitals, community organizations and advocacy groups nationwide who are committed to protecting access to affordable health coverage for all.

We urge you to prioritize a congressional solution that will extend the enhanced premium tax credits beyond December 31, 2025, ensuring our communities continue to have access to the care they need. Kansans—and the hospitals that care for them—are counting on your leadership.

Sincerely,



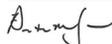
Kevin Strecker, CEO  
Ascension Via Christi



Joshua Gant, CEO  
Hillsboro Community Hospital



Chris Graham, CEO  
Caldwell Regional Medical Center



Preston Sauers, CEO  
Kingman Healthcare Center



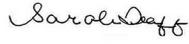
Sandra Dickerson, CEO  
Greenwood County Hospital



Vallerie Gleason, President & CEO  
NMC Health

<sup>1</sup>4.8 Million People Will Lose Coverage in 2026 if Enhanced Premium Tax Credits Expire, September 2025.

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Sarah Teaff, CEO  
Patterson Health Center



Joel Phelps, President & CEO  
Salina Regional Health Center



Bill Voloch, President & CEO  
Wesley Healthcare



Robert W. Steele, MD, MBA  
Children's Mercy Kansas City



## 4.8 Million People Will Lose Coverage in 2026 If Enhanced Premium Tax Credits Expire

*Matthew Buettgens, Michael Simpson, Jason Levitis, Fernando Hernandez-Lepe, and Jessica Banthin*

*September 2025*

Enhanced premium tax credits (PTCs), which aim to expand and stabilize health insurance coverage, have been in place in the Marketplaces since 2021, but are set to expire after this year.<sup>1</sup> The enhanced PTCs substantially lowered the premiums people needed to pay for insurance in the Marketplace: they reduced net premiums to zero for some people with low incomes and made subsidies available to people with higher incomes for the first time. Since the enhancements took effect in 2021, Marketplace enrollment has more than doubled.<sup>2</sup> After omitting the PTC enhancements from the recently adopted One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), Congress is continuing to debate whether to allow them to expire, extend them, or make them permanent.

In this brief, we estimate the impact on coverage of the expiration of enhanced PTCs that would occur in 2026 without action by Congress. We model these scenarios against a baseline that incorporates the rules expected to be in effect in 2026, including the major provisions of the OBBBA that will be in effect in 2026 and 2026 provisions of the Marketplace Integrity and Affordability rule released by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS),<sup>3</sup> except for provisions stayed by a Maryland District Court on August 22.<sup>4</sup>

We also calculate household net premiums (after subsidies) with and without enhanced PTCs to measure the erosion of affordability if enhancements end. We find that the expiration of enhanced PTCs would cause nearly 5 million people to become uninsured and would worsen the affordability of coverage for all Marketplace enrollees.

Our key findings are as follows:

- We project that 7.3 million fewer people will receive subsidized Marketplace coverage in 2026 if PTCs revert to their standard levels than if enhanced PTCs are extended. Eight states, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia, would see their subsidized Marketplace enrollment fall by more than half.
- Without enhanced PTCs, we project that 4.8 million more people will be uninsured in 2026 relative to a policy that extends enhanced PTCs, an increase in the uninsured population of 21 percent.
  - » Non-Hispanic Black people, non-Hispanic White people, and young adults would see the largest increases in uninsurance.
- In 2026, we project that average net premiums, the portion paid by individuals or households after PTCs, will be over four times as large (\$919 versus \$169) for people with subsidized Marketplace coverage and incomes below 250 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL; 250 percent of FPL is \$39,125 for an individual and \$80,375 for a family of four) under standard PTCs, compared with a policy of enhanced PTCs.
- Net premiums will more than double, from \$1,171 to \$2,455, for people with incomes from 250 percent of FPL to 400 percent of FPL.
- Finally, net premiums will nearly double, from \$4,436 to \$8,471, for people with incomes above 400 percent of FPL who receive subsidized Marketplace coverage under enhanced PTCs, but who would pay the full premium were they to expire.

After 2026, more provisions of the OBBA and the Marketplace Integrity and Affordability rule will come into effect, reducing Marketplace enrollment with or without enhanced PTCs. Also, if the Marketplace Integrity rule provisions that were stayed by a Maryland District Court on August 22 do not take effect in 2026 but take effect in 2027, enrollment could be further reduced.

## Background

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) of 2010 transformed the nongroup market by prohibiting exclusions for preexisting conditions; requiring community-rated premiums that vary only by age, region, and smoking status; regulating what types of policies can be sold; and defining a set of minimum essential health benefits. The ACA also established Marketplaces where eligible people could access premium tax credits that subsidized the cost of coverage. Most people with incomes below 100 percent of FPL (\$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family of four) and all people with incomes above 400 percent of FPL (\$62,600 for an individual and \$128,600 for a family of four) were not eligible for the PTCs.<sup>4</sup> For eligible income groups, PTCs progressively decline with income and limit the share of household income that individuals owe toward their net premium (table 1). These shares are indexed;

for 2026 the shares range from 2.10 percent of income for people with incomes between 100 and 138 percent of FPL (between \$15,650 and \$21,597 for an individual and between \$32,150 and \$44,367 for a family of four) to 9.96 percent of income for people with incomes between 300 and 400 percent of FPL (between \$46,950 and \$62,600 for an individual and between \$96,450 and \$128,600 for a family of four).

TABLE 1  
ACA Subsidy Schedule under Enhanced and Standard Marketplace Premium Tax Credits, 2026

Premium Tax Credit Percentage-of-Income Limits for Benchmark Coverage (%)		
Income (% of FPL)	Enhanced PTCs	Standard PTCs
Less than 138	0.00	2.10
138–150	0.00	3.14–4.19
150–200	0.00–2.00	4.19–6.60
200–250	2.00–4.00	6.60–8.44
250–300	4.00–6.00	8.44–9.96
300–400	6.00–8.50	9.96
400 or greater	8.50	none

Source: American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub L. No. 117-2; and \*26 CFR 601.105: Examination of Returns and Claims for Refund, Credit, or Abatement; Determination of Correct Tax Liability, \* [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov), accessed September 12, 2025.

Notes: ACA = Affordable Care Act; PTC = premium tax credit; FPL = federal poverty level. FPL varies by year and household size; for 2025, FPL is \$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family of four; 250 percent of FPL is \$39,125 for an individual and \$80,375 for a family of four; 400 percent of FPL is \$62,600 for an individual and \$128,600 for a family of four.

Effective in April 2021, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) changed the premium subsidy schedule by lowering the limits on the share of household income people pay for premiums in the ACA Marketplace. The Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 then extended this change through 2025. Under the standard PTCs, for example, people with incomes below 150 percent of FPL (\$23,475 for an individual and \$48,225 for a family of four) would have to pay as much as 4.19 percent of their income toward premiums for a benchmark plan (the second-lowest-cost silver plan in their rating area) in 2026. Under the enhanced PTCs (if extended to 2026), they would pay zero percent of their income. The ARPA reduced payment thresholds across all income categories, which substantially reduced net premiums for households. The ARPA also extended eligibility for PTCs to higher-income groups. Under the standard PTCs, people with incomes over 400 percent of FPL are not eligible for any premium tax credits. Under the enhanced PTCs, eligible people in this group pay no more than 8.5 percent of their income.

Largely in response to the enhanced PTCs, Marketplace plan selections during the annual open enrollment period have grown steadily since 2021, from 12.0 million in that year to 14.5 million in 2022, 16.4 million in 2023, and 21.4 million in 2024.<sup>6</sup> In 2025, plan selections increased 14 percent to a total of 24.3 million people signing up for coverage. Changes in the number of plan selections provide a good estimate of the trend but do not accurately measure actual enrollment. Numbers drop when the first monthly premiums are due, and there is often midyear attrition. In this brief, we present estimates of average monthly enrollment, a more accurate measure of coverage.

Other policy changes will also affect coverage in 2026, regardless of what happens with the enhancements. The reconciliation bill signed in July of 2025 includes three provisions that will reduce Marketplace enrollment in 2026, while other provisions will take effect in later years. Specifically, it:

- eliminates PTC eligibility for lawfully present immigrants who have income under 100 percent of FPL but are ineligible for Medicaid by reason of their immigration status,
- eliminates the caps on repayment of advance PTC payments so that those who receive advance tax credits above what their actual annual income would permit must generally repay them in full when filing taxes for that year, and
- prohibits special enrollment periods for people with incomes up to 150 percent of FPL.<sup>7</sup>

Some parts of the Marketplace Integrity rule will be in effect in 2026, including the following provisions:

- eliminate eligibility for immigrants with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival status
- shorten the window for submitting documentation to substantiate eligibility information
- revise standards for agents and brokers in the federally run Marketplaces
- eliminate insurer options to continue coverage when an enrollee has a de minimis premium underpayment
- prohibit special enrollment periods tied to the income of the applicant
- change indexing rules to increase cost-sharing and reduce PTCs over time
- eliminate measures to automatically shift enrollees from bronze to silver coverage to receive additional subsidies
- prohibit the inclusion of gender-affirming care among the essential health benefits

Our analysis assumes all these provisions of the OBBBA and the Marketplace Integrity rule are in effect in 2026, with or without the PTC enhancements being extended. We assume that the provisions of the Marketplace Integrity rule that were stayed by a Maryland District Court on August 22 will not be in effect in 2026.

## Data and Methods

We used the Urban Institute's Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model (HIPSM) to produce our analysis of the effects of PTC generosity on coverage and household spending in 2026.<sup>8</sup> The Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model is a microsimulation model of the US health care system focused on the nonelderly population and is designed to estimate the cost and coverage effects of proposed policy changes. The model's baseline is regularly updated to reflect changes in law, state policies such as Medicaid expansion, premium increases, population growth, general inflation, and the most recent

published Medicaid and Marketplace enrollment and costs in each state. We project the model's baseline to 2026.

For this brief, we updated the Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model using 2025 Marketplace premiums and state-level Marketplace enrollment data from the 2025 Open Enrollment Period Report snapshot released by CMS.<sup>9</sup> We adjusted the Open Enrollment Period Report snapshot numbers downward to more accurately represent average monthly Marketplace enrollment for the entire year. These adjustments reflect the "effectuation" of plan choices and midyear attrition. We first calibrated the model to replicate 2025 enrollment with 2025 premiums and Marketplace rules. We then simulated 2026 enrollment and costs in two different ways: (1) assuming enhanced PTCs were extended and remained in effect; and (2) assuming enhanced PTCs expire at the end of 2025 and standard PTCs were back in place. Enrollment totals for the latter scenario are comparable to enrollment totals before enhanced PTCs and the COVID-era Medicaid continuous coverage requirements were in effect, except for states with recent policy changes, such as additional state-funded Marketplace subsidies. Under both the enhanced and standard PTC scenarios, our estimated effects reflect 2026 provisions of the OBBA and the 2026 Marketplace Integrity rule not stayed by the court, as explained above. The two most significant OBBA changes affecting enrollment are the loss of PTC eligibility for lawfully present immigrants with incomes below 100 percent of FPL and the loss of the special enrollment period for people with incomes below 150 percent of FPL. For this analysis, Medicaid baseline enrollment for 2026 does not reflect provisions in the OBBA because the major provisions affecting Medicaid enrollment do not take effect until later years.

People in New York with incomes up to 250 percent of FPL and in Minnesota and Oregon with incomes up to 200 percent of FPL who would be eligible for Marketplace PTCs in other states would instead be covered by a Basic Health Program (BHP) or state waiver that builds on BHP (as in New York). This coverage has both lower premiums and cost sharing than Marketplace coverage, even with enhanced PTCs. For example, New York offers comprehensive coverage with no premiums to eligible people with incomes up to 250 percent of FPL. The expiration of enhanced PTCs will not directly change BHP coverage, but it will reduce federal funding for BHP. States may need to raise BHP premiums and/or cost sharing if they are unable to make up for the shortfall. Also, the OBBA terminates eligibility for low-income lawfully present immigrants. Several hundred thousand such people reside in New York, and the federal funding for their coverage is a crucial part of the state's waiver. As a result, New York has announced that it plans to eliminate waiver coverage of people with incomes between 200 and 250 percent FPL, while keeping BHP coverage for people with incomes up to 200 percent FPL.<sup>10</sup> Our results do not assume changes in BHP or New York's waiver, as the announcement came after our results were finalized.

## Results

### Decrease in Marketplace Enrollment and Increase in Uninsurance

*Eliminating enhanced PTCs will decrease Marketplace enrollment of people receiving PTCs by 7.3 million and increase the number of uninsured people in the US by 4.8 million in 2026 (table 2). By making coverage less affordable, standard PTCs will shrink the subsidized Marketplace to cover 11.7 million people in 2026, compared with 19.0 million people if enhanced PTCs stay in effect, a decrease of 7.3 million, or 38 percent. The nongroup market overall—which includes subsidized and unsubsidized Marketplace coverage, other nongroup coverage purchased outside the Marketplace that complies with federal standards, and the BHP—will cover 19.2 million people under standard PTCs, compared with 26.9 million people if enhanced PTCs stay in effect, a reduction of 7.7 million (29 percent).*

TABLE 2  
Projected Coverage of the Nonelderly under Enhanced and Standard Marketplace Premium Tax Credits, 2026  
Thousands of people

	Enhanced PTCs		Standard PTCs		Change	% difference
<b>Insured (MEC)</b>	<b>255,953</b>	<b>91.0%</b>	<b>251,069</b>	<b>89.2%</b>	<b>-4,885</b>	<b>-1.9%</b>
Employer	147,077	52.3%	150,298	53.4%	3,221	2.2%
Private nongroup	26,921	9.6%	19,219	6.8%	-7,702	-28.6%
Basic Health Program	1,840	0.7%	1,826	0.6%	-14	-0.7%
Marketplace with PTC, <250% of FPL	11,984	4.3%	7,747	2.8%	-4,237	-35.4%
Marketplace with PTC, 250–400% of FPL	6,077	2.2%	3,973	1.4%	-2,104	-34.6%
Marketplace with PTC, > 400% of FPL	947	0.3%	0	0.0%	-947	-100.0%
Full-pay nongroup	6,073	2.2%	5,673	2%	-400	-6.6%
Medicaid/CHIP	73,198	26.0%	72,795	25.9%	-403	-0.6%
Other public	8,757	3.1%	8,757	3.1%	0	0.0%
<b>Noncompliant nongroup (without MEC)</b>	<b>2,305</b>	<b>0.8%</b>	<b>2,424</b>	<b>0.9%</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>5.2%</b>
<b>Uninsured</b>	<b>23,150</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>27,915</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>4,765</b>	<b>20.6%</b>

Source: The Urban Institute, Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model, 2025.

Notes: MEC = minimum essential coverage; FPL = federal poverty level; PTC = premium tax credit; CHIP = Children's Health Insurance Program. FPL varies by year and household size; for 2025, FPL is \$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family of four; 250 percent of FPL is \$39,125 for an individual and \$80,375 for a family of four; 400 percent of FPL is \$62,600 for an individual and \$128,600 for a family of four.

If the enhanced PTCs expire, many fewer people would be attracted to the Marketplace. For example, uninsured people who would qualify for zero or very low premiums under the enhanced PTCs will find it much less affordable to purchase coverage under standard PTCs and are more likely to remain uninsured. In other cases, people with employer-sponsored insurance offers who qualify for Marketplace subsidies because their offers are deemed unaffordable (costing more than 9.96 percent of household income for a single person) and who choose Marketplace coverage under enhanced PTCs will make the switch back to employer-sponsored insurance or go uninsured under standard PTCs.

Additionally, some firms (primarily small firms) may decide to offer health coverage to their employees when enhanced PTCs are not available. We estimate 3.2 million more people will choose employer-sponsored insurance under standard PTCs than under enhanced PTCs, an increase of about 2 percent.

Under standard PTCs, there will be a small decrease in the number of people enrolled in Medicaid in 2026, compared with a policy of enhanced PTCs. These are mostly Medicaid-eligible children who would be enrolled in Medicaid when their parents take up Marketplace coverage, but who, if their parents leave the Marketplace, become uninsured. This is the reverse of the "woodwork effect" in which take-up of Medicaid- and CHIP-eligible children increased with increased household Marketplace enrollment.

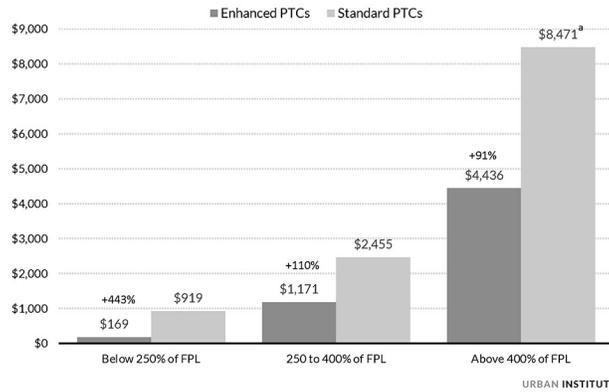
#### **Increased Household Spending and Decreased Marketplace Enrollment by Income**

*The elimination of enhanced PTCs substantially reduces the affordability of Marketplace premiums across all income categories.* Net premiums will increase for all individuals and families under the standard PTC subsidy schedule, which is less generous than the enhanced PTC subsidy schedule. Net premiums will also increase because of the indirect impact on premiums of changes in the risk pool. If enhanced PTCs expire, healthier people are more likely to disenroll than others in response to higher premiums, thus increasing the average health risk of enrollees. We project that under the expiration of enhanced PTCs, total Marketplace premiums (before subsidies) will be 6 percent higher on average across all states in 2026 compared with total Marketplace premiums under a policy of extending enhanced PTCs (data not shown). This premium increase would also affect employers that provide coverage for their workers through the individual market, for example, using an individual coverage health reimbursement arrangement.

Accounting for both factors, we project substantial increases in net premiums. People with incomes below 250 percent of FPL will pay an average of \$919 annually for subsidized Marketplace coverage under standard PTCs, more than quadrupling from \$169 under enhanced PTCs (figure 1). The average net premium under enhanced PTCs is notably low because many people in this income category (those with income below 150 percent of FPL) are eligible for zero-premium plans. We project that people with incomes between 250 and 400 percent of FPL will pay \$2,455 in average annual premiums for subsidized Marketplace coverage in 2026 under standard PTCs, compared with \$1,171 under enhanced PTCs, an increase of 110 percent.

Policies under both enhanced and standard PTCs require that household premium contributions get larger as income increases. This pattern is seen in figure 1, where we see that people with incomes over 400 percent of FPL pay the highest average premiums. People in this income category are eligible for federal subsidies under enhanced PTCs but not under original PTCs. We project they will pay \$8,471 in average annual premiums in 2026 under standard PTCs, which is over 90 percent above the amount they would pay if enhanced PTCs remained.

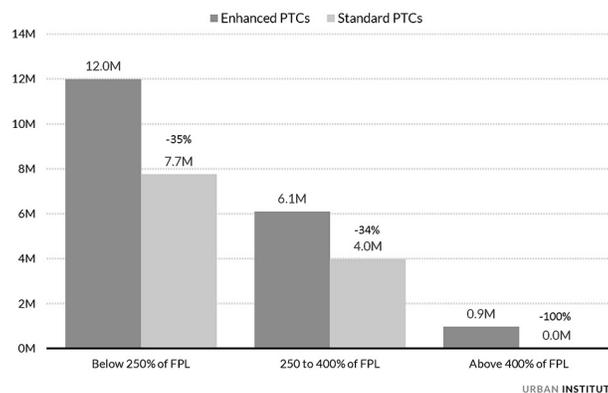
FIGURE 1  
**Projected Average Annual Premiums Paid by People with Subsidized Marketplace Coverage under Enhanced and Standard Premium Tax Credits, by Federal Poverty Level, 2026**



Source: The Urban Institute, Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model, 2025.  
 Note: PTC = premium tax credit; FPL = federal poverty level. FPL varies by year and household size; for 2024, FPL is \$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family of four, and 400 percent of FPL is \$62,600 for an individual and \$128,600 for a family of four. Percentages are the differences between net premiums under enhanced and standard premium tax credits per FPL category.  
<sup>a</sup>No federal subsidies are available to people above 400 percent of FPL under original PTCs, so premiums shown are for unsubsidized Marketplace participants who would have been subsidized under enhanced PTCs.

*Expiration of enhanced PTCs leads to lower Marketplace enrollment in all income categories.* We estimate lower Marketplace enrollment across all income categories in 2026 because of standard PTCs replacing enhanced PTCs (figure 2). Among people with incomes below 250 percent of FPL, we project a decrease in subsidized Marketplace coverage of 4.2 million people, or 35 percent. Among people with incomes between 250 and 400 percent of FPL, we project a decrease of 2.1 million people, or 34 percent.

FIGURE 2  
Subsidized Marketplace Coverage with Enhanced and Standard Premium Tax Credits by Federal Poverty Level, 2026



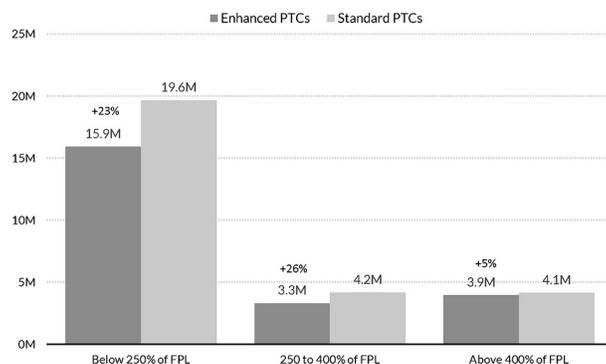
Source: The Urban Institute, Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model, 2025.

Note: PTC = premium tax credit; FPL = federal poverty level. FPL varies by year and household size; for 2024, FPL is \$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family of four, and 400 percent of FPL is \$62,600 for an individual and \$128,600 for a family of four.

Among people with incomes above 400 percent of FPL, who first became eligible for PTCs in 2021, we project a substantial decrease in Marketplace enrollment in 2026 if enhanced PTCs expire. Under standard PTCs, people in this group would not be eligible for any federal subsidies.<sup>11</sup> In 2026, we project that over 900,000 people in this income category will lose subsidized Marketplace coverage and either pay the full premium without assistance or drop nongroup coverage.

**Expiration of enhanced PTCs increases uninsurance in all income categories.** We estimate greater uninsurance across all income categories, but especially among those with incomes below 400 percent of FPL, in 2026 if standard PTCs replace enhanced PTCs (figure 3). Among people with incomes below 250 percent of FPL, we project an increase in uninsurance of 3.7 million people, or 23 percent. Almost 90 percent of people in that group who lose subsidized Marketplace coverage will become uninsured. Among people with incomes between 250 and 400 percent of FPL, we project an increase in uninsurance of 0.9 million people, a 26 percent rise that represents over 40 percent of those losing nongroup coverage with PTCs.

FIGURE 3  
**Uninsurance among the Nonelderly with Enhanced and Standard Marketplace Premium Tax Credits by Federal Poverty Level, 2026**



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: The Urban Institute, Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model, 2025.

Note: PTC = premium tax credit; FPL = federal poverty level. FPL varies by year and household size; for 2024, FPL is \$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family of four, and 400 percent of FPL is \$62,600 for an individual and \$128,600 for a family of four.

Among people with incomes above 400 percent of FPL, who will not be eligible for any federal subsidies if enhanced PTCs expire, we project that 0.2 million people will become uninsured. This 5 percent increase in uninsurance is 20 percent of those losing PTCs. People in this group are more likely to pick up coverage from an employer than those in other groups and are more willing to pay the full premium, which will average more than \$4,000 more without assistance than with the PTC.

#### Variation in Coverage Effects by States and Selected Demographic Subgroups

*The effects of expiration of the enhanced PTCs on subsidized Marketplace coverage and uninsurance would vary widely by state.* Decreases in enrollment would be as small as 9 percent in Utah and Vermont and 12 percent in Connecticut, which fully subsidizes premiums and cost sharing up to 175 percent of FPL, to 60 percent or more in Louisiana and Texas (table 2). Increases in uninsurance vary as well, with minimal changes in Hawaii, Vermont, and the District of Columbia, but increases of 50 percent in South Carolina and 65 percent in Mississippi.

TABLE 3  
Change in Subsidized Marketplace Coverage and Uninsurance by State under Expiration of Enhanced PTCs, 2026

State	Subsidized Marketplace Coverage		Uninsurance	
	Change	Percent difference	Change	Percent difference
<b>Total</b>	<b>-7,288</b>	<b>-38%</b>	<b>4,765</b>	<b>21%</b>
Alabama	-198	-45%	125	34%
Alaska	-7	-29%	7	8%
Arizona	-145	-42%	141	24%
Arkansas	-57	-40%	40	24%
California	-420	-25%	203	8%
Colorado	-71	-31%	63	16%
Connecticut	-14	-12%	7	4%
Delaware	-12	-29%	7	11%
District of Columbia	-1	-45%	*	1%
Florida	-1,080	-33%	592	29%
Georgia	-694	-53%	372	39%
Hawaii	-3	-18%	1	1%
Idaho	-35	-38%	15	9%
Illinois	-110	-28%	106	10%
Indiana	-89	-37%	86	22%
Iowa	-27	-28%	24	24%
Kansas	-73	-42%	82	32%
Kentucky	-18	-26%	13	6%
Louisiana	-144	-61%	85	32%
Maine	-9	-15%	8	15%
Maryland	-47	-24%	32	9%
Massachusetts	-48	-16%	7	3%
Michigan	-108	-27%	64	16%
Minnesota	-12	-12%	8	3%
Mississippi	-150	-58%	145	65%
Missouri	-114	-34%	60	15%
Montana	-21	-31%	15	29%
Nebraska	-22	-22%	18	17%
Nevada	-29	-30%	22	5%
New Hampshire	-14	-29%	12	20%
New Jersey	-81	-23%	57	9%
New Mexico	-11	-17%	9	4%
New York	-52	-37%	27	4%
North Carolina	-123	-17%	36	4%
North Dakota	-11	-32%	5	9%
Ohio	-143	-34%	107	26%
Oklahoma	-99	-39%	60	18%
Oregon	-57	-55%	59	24%
Pennsylvania	-92	-20%	74	14%
Rhode Island	-6	-15%	2	5%
South Carolina	-330	-57%	183	50%
South Dakota	-14	-38%	14	25%
Tennessee	-270	-54%	203	41%
Texas	-1,936	-60%	1,382	39%
Utah	-28	-9%	9	4%
Vermont	-3	-9%	*	**
Virginia	-94	-30%	50	9%
Washington	-57	-25%	46	9%

State	Subsidized Marketplace Coverage		Uninsurance	
	Change	Percent difference	Change	Percent difference
<b>Total</b>	<b>-7,288</b>	<b>-38%</b>	<b>4,765</b>	<b>21%</b>
West Virginia	-30	-58%	27	35%
Wisconsin	-60	-23%	35	9%
Wyoming	-15	-33%	18	26%

Source: The Urban Institute, Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model, 2025.

Note: PTC = premium tax credit. \* = less than 500 people; \*\* = less than 0.5%. Changes are from a baseline of extended enhanced PTCs.

**Increases in uninsurance if enhanced PTCs expire will not fall evenly among different people.**

Uninsurance will increase by as much as 30 percent among Black, non-Hispanic people, and by 25 percent among White, non-Hispanic people. Uninsurance among Hispanics would increase by a smaller rate, 15 percent, largely because of immigration restrictions on eligibility for PTCs (table 4).

The number of uninsured young adults ages 19 to 34 would increase by 25 percent without enhanced PTCs, notably higher than the increase for older adults (19 percent for ages 35 to 54 and 17 percent for ages 55 to 64). Children would see a smaller increase in uninsurance (14 percent) because of their higher income eligibility for Medicaid and CHIP, though, as we have noted, fewer children would be enrolled in these programs as fewer parents seek Marketplace coverage.

TABLE 4  
Characteristics of the Nonelderly Uninsured under Enhanced and Standard Marketplace Premium Tax Credits, 2026

Characteristics	Uninsured under Enhanced PTCs		Uninsured under Standard PTCs		Difference	% difference
	Number of uninsured	Uninsured rate	Number of uninsured	Uninsured rate		
<b>Race &amp; Ethnicity</b>						
White, non-Hispanic	8,914	5.3%	11,175	6.6%	2,261	25%
Hispanic	8,839	17.2%	10,130	19.7%	1,291	15%
Black, non-Hispanic	3,115	9.0%	4,040	11.6%	925	30%
Asian and Pacific Islander	1,264	7.9%	1,380	8.7%	116	9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	699	14.3%	824	16.8%	125	18%
Other	318	5.9%	367	6.8%	48	15%
<b>Age group</b>						
0-18	3,347	4.2%	3,800	4.8%	453	14%
19-34	9,040	12.4%	11,316	15.5%	2,276	25%
35-54	8,414	9.4%	10,041	11.2%	1,627	19%
55-64	2,348	6.1%	2,758	7.1%	410	17%
<b>Total</b>	<b>23,150</b>	<b>8.2%</b>	<b>27,915</b>	<b>9.9%</b>	<b>4,765</b>	<b>21%</b>

Source: The Urban Institute, Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model, 2025.

Note: PTC = premium tax credit.

## Discussion

The enhanced PTCs originally adopted under ARPA in 2021 and extended through 2025 by the Inflation Reduction Act have dramatically increased enrollment in the Marketplace. In this brief, we compare scenarios with and without enhanced PTCs to demonstrate the full impact of the tax credits in 2026. We project that in 2026, reverting to standard PTCs would decrease subsidized Marketplace enrollment by 7.3 million compared with a scenario that extends enhanced PTCs, or 38 percent. Eight states, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and West Virginia, would see their subsidized Marketplace enrollment fall by more than half. By making premiums for Marketplace coverage significantly less affordable, these subsidies will also increase the number of uninsured by 4.8 million people, a 21 percent increase compared with a policy of extended enhanced PTCs.

We find that allowing the enhanced PTCs to expire substantially increases net premium costs for those getting PTCs across all income groups. If enhanced PTCs expire, net premiums would more than quadruple in the lowest income groups, below 250 percent of FPL; net premiums would more than double for people with incomes between 250 and 400 percent of FPL, and would nearly double for those with incomes above 400 percent of FPL. The debate around the OBBBA and uncertainty around CMS Marketplace rules occurred as insurers submitted bids and states announced final 2026 premiums. These have now been set in each state and may not automatically change in response to late changes, such as the court stay of the Marketplace rules or the renewal of enhanced PTCs if they are expanded. After 2026, however, average health risk would increase if enhanced PTCs expire, and that would additionally increase gross premiums faced by those above 400 percent of FPL who are no longer eligible for PTCs.

The expiration of the enhanced PTCs would reduce the size of the overall nongroup market, including the Marketplace, and increase the likelihood of insurer exits and less competition among insurers. Compared with the fluctuation and instability of premiums in the nongroup market before the ACA, this is a significant and sometimes overlooked benefit. A larger market with more enrollees encourages more entry from insurers, resulting in greater competition among the insurers and potentially leading to more plan choices and lower premium increases than would occur in a smaller nongroup market (Jacobs, Banthin, and Trachtman 2015). A larger market is also more protected against the risk of disruption should an insurer leave the market. **Although market size doesn't protect against rising health care costs, it may offer space for state policy innovations.**

This additional market size and stability could be even more important after 2026, when the OBBBA provisions, such as further restrictions on PTC eligibility for lawfully present immigrants and the elimination of automatic enrollment with PTCs, will reduce Marketplace enrollment further, with or without enhanced PTCs. Also, if provisions of the 2026 Marketplace Integrity rule that have been stayed by the court take effect in later years, there would be further reductions in enrollment. At the time of writing, it is unclear what would be in effect after 2026.

Both we and the Congressional Budget Office estimated last year that enhanced PTCs would reduce uninsurance by roughly 4 million people (Banthin et al. 2024). Enrollment in the 2025 open enrollment period was substantially higher than in 2024, so we now estimate that enhanced PTCs would make a larger difference in uninsurance, given the court stay of CMS rules and that few OBBA provisions affecting Marketplace enrollment take effect in 2026.

We do not assume major economic changes in 2026. If there is an economic downturn, employer-sponsored health insurance would be lower both with and without enhanced PTCs. More people losing Marketplace coverage under a scenario without enhanced PTCs would become uninsured, and fewer would transition to employer-sponsored insurance. Even without an economic downturn, employers are predicted to face the largest increase in health benefit costs this fall since 2010, with premium increases, even after planned reductions in benefits, rising by 6.5 percent on average, which could affect the affordability of employer-sponsored coverage and lead to reduced offers of health insurance from small employers.<sup>12</sup>

Both potential economic trends highlight the critical role of the Marketplace to serve as an important source of coverage for those without access to employer-sponsored insurance. The Marketplace also serves the self-employed. For example, it is estimated that nearly half of the adults currently enrolled in the Marketplace are self-employed, own small businesses, or work for small employers with fewer than 25 workers.<sup>13</sup> Under an economic downturn without enhanced PTCs, self-employed and small business employees would have fewer options for affordable coverage.

## Conclusion

Since the enhanced PTCs were first adopted in 2021, they have led to record-high enrollment in the Marketplaces at all income levels. They will expire at the end of 2025 without action from Congress. Enhanced PTCs resulted in lower net premiums for Marketplace consumers at all income levels and created a zero-cost premium option for many low-income consumers. Even those not eligible for PTCs see lower premiums with enhanced PTCs because the additional enrollment has improved the nongroup market risk pool. If Congress does not extend enhanced PTCs, we project that these gains will be reversed, and 4.8 million people will become uninsured in 2026.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The enhanced PTCs were adopted in the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 and were extended by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Marketplace Open Enrollment Period Public Use Files for 2021–25, see “Marketplace Products,” CMS.gov, accessed September 12, 2025, <https://www.cms.gov/data-research/statistics-trends-and-reports/marketplace-products>.

<sup>3</sup> “2025 Marketplace Integrity and Affordability Final Rule,” CMS.gov, June 20, 2025, <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/2025-marketplace-integrity-and-affordability-final-rule>.

<sup>4</sup> See *City of Columbus v. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.* The parts of the rule stayed by the Maryland District Court include the following provisions:

- permit coverage denials for past-due premiums
- require additional documentation to verify income
- require additional documents to verify eligibility for special enrollment periods through the federal Marketplace
- deny advance PTC payments more quickly for failure to satisfy tax filing requirements
- require a minimum \$5 premium from consumers who are automatically re-enrolled in the federal Marketplace
- expand the de minimis ranges for Marketplace plans actuarial values

For all but the last of these provisions, the Department of Justice has not asked for emergency relief, so they will not take effect for the coming open enrollment period. For the provision expanding the de minimis ranges for Marketplace plan actuarial values, the Department of Justice has asked for an immediate reversal, though that provision remains stayed as of this writing.

<sup>5</sup> Recent immigrants (within five years) who were ineligible for Medicaid for immigration reasons could have eligibility below 100 percent of FPL.

The standard (original law) PTC income thresholds are indexed, so vary from year to year. They are, however, always less generous than the thresholds under ARPA/Inflation Reduction Act. Thresholds for 2026 are available at “26 CFR 601.105: Examination of Returns and Claims for Refund, Credit, or Abatement; Determination of Correct Tax Liability,” [IRS.gov](https://www.irs.gov), accessed September 12, 2025.

Lastly, FPL varies by year and household size; for 2025 FPL is \$15,650 for an individual and \$32,150 for a family of four; 250 percent of FPL is \$39,125 for an individual and \$80,375 for a family of four; 400 percent of FPL is \$62,600 for an individual and \$128,600 for a family of four; FPL levels are higher in Alaska and Hawaii; all levels can be found at “2025 Poverty Guidelines: 48 Contiguous States (all states except Alaska and Hawaii),” [ASPE.HSS.gov](https://www.aspe.hhs.gov), accessed September 12, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Marketplace Open Enrollment Period Public Use Files for 2021–25, see “Marketplace Products,” [CMS.gov](https://www.cms.gov).

<sup>7</sup> Both the OBBBA and the Marketplace Integrity rule effectively eliminate income-based Special Enrollment Periods in 2026.

<sup>8</sup> Urban Institute, “The Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model,” in “Quantitative Data Analysis,” accessed May 14, 2024, <https://www.urban.org/research/data-methods/data-analysis/quantitative-data-analysis/microsimulation/health-insurance-policy-simulation-model-hipsm>.

<sup>9</sup> “Marketplace 2024 Open Enrollment Period Report: National Snapshot,” [CMS.gov](https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/marketplace-2024-open-enrollment-period-report-national-snapshot-0), January 10, 2024, <https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/fact-sheets/marketplace-2024-open-enrollment-period-report-national-snapshot-0>.

<sup>10</sup> “Following Devastating Federal Funding Cuts, New York State Takes New Action to Preserve Health Care for as Many New Yorkers as Possible,” [New York State Department of Health](https://www.health.ny.gov/press/releases/2025/2025-09-10_federal_funding_cuts.htm), September 10, 2025, [https://www.health.ny.gov/press/releases/2025/2025-09-10\\_federal\\_funding\\_cuts.htm](https://www.health.ny.gov/press/releases/2025/2025-09-10_federal_funding_cuts.htm).

<sup>11</sup> California previously offered premium subsidies to persons with incomes over 400 percent of FPL, but discontinued the program when ARPA/Inflation Reduction Act subsidies became available. New Jersey currently offers limited premium subsidies to persons with incomes up to 600 percent of FPL. See Louise Norris, “Which States Offer Their Own Health Insurance Subsidies,” [Healthinsurance.org](https://www.healthinsurance.org/faqs/which-states-offer-their-own-health-insurance-subsidies/), May 8, 2024, <https://www.healthinsurance.org/faqs/which-states-offer-their-own-health-insurance-subsidies/>.

<sup>12</sup> Beth Umland and Sunit Patel, “Employers Prepare for the Highest Health Benefit Cost Increase in 15 Years,” [Mercer](https://www.mercer.com/en-us/insights/us-health-news/employers-prepare-for-the-highest-health-benefit-cost-increase-in-15-years/), September 3, 2025, <https://www.mercer.com/en-us/insights/us-health-news/employers-prepare-for-the-highest-health-benefit-cost-increase-in-15-years/>.

<sup>13</sup> Matt McGough, Gary Claxton, Matthew Rae, and Cynthia Cox, "About Half of Adults with ACA Marketplace Coverage are Small Business Owners, Employees, or Self-Employed," KFF, September 10, 2025, <https://www.kff.org/affordable-care-act/about-half-of-adults-with-aca-marketplace-coverage-are-small-business-owners-employees-or-self-employed/>.

## References

Banthin, Jessica, Matthew Buettgens, Michael Simpson, and Jason Levitis. 2024. "Who Benefits from Enhanced Premium Tax Credits in the Marketplace?." Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Jacobs, Paul D., Jessica S. Banthin, and Samuel Trachtman. 2015. "Insurer Competition in Federally Run Marketplaces Is Associated with Lower Premiums." *Health Affairs* 34 (12). <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0548>.

## About the Authors

**Matthew Buettgens** is a senior fellow in the Health Policy Division at the Urban Institute, where he is the mathematician leading the development of Urban's Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model (HIPSM). The model is used to provide technical assistance for health reform implementation in Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Virginia, and Washington, and by the federal government. His recent work includes several research papers analyzing various aspects of national health insurance reform, both nationally and state-by-state. Research topics have included the costs and coverage implications of Medicaid expansion for both federal and state governments; small firm self-insurance under the ACA and its effect on the fully insured market; state-by-state analysis of changes in health insurance coverage and the remaining uninsured; the effect of reform on employers; the affordability of coverage under health insurance exchanges; and the implications of age rating for the affordability of coverage.

**Michael Simpson** is a principal research associate at the Health Policy Division. He has 25 years of experience developing economic models and using survey and administrative data. His current work focuses on using Urban's Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model to project health insurance coverage and spending both in the baseline and under policy alternatives. Before joining Urban, Simpson developed the Congressional Budget Office's long-term dynamic microsimulation model. He analyzed numerous policy reform proposals, investigated differences between various projections of Social Security finances and benefits, quantified the importance of Monte Carlo variation in model results, and created multiple methods to demonstrate uncertainty in projections.

**Jason Levitis** is a senior fellow in the Health Policy Division and a nonresident senior fellow at Yale Law School's Solomon Center for Health Law and Policy. He conducts research on health insurance policy and provides technical assistance to state health officials. Levitis's research focuses on federal and state policies affecting private health coverage, the ACA, and the intersection of health care and tax law. He has worked extensively on federal and state financing and regulation of private health coverage, health insurance subsidies, Section 1332 waivers, and interactions with federal tax law. He is deeply versed in operational issues and approaches to minimizing consumers' administrative burdens.

**Fernando Hernandez-Lepe** is a research associate in the Tax and Income Supports Division at the Urban Institute. He has more than 10 years of experience conducting quantitative research on topics related to aging, health care, food access, and education workforce development. His work on simulations includes supporting Urban's Health Insurance Policy Simulation Model (HIPSM) and the Social Genome Model. Additionally, he has developed work assessing the impact of removing SNAP benefits once the expansions expired, decision-making of informal caregivers and elder parents related to where to move, and how this decision links to the propensity of providing care, both using multivariate regression modeling, including probabilistic and difference-in-difference modeling.

**Jessica S. Banthin** is a senior fellow in the Health Policy Division, where she studies the effects of health insurance reform policies on coverage, costs, and households' financial burdens. Before joining the Urban Institute, she served for more than 25 years in the federal government, most recently as deputy director for health at the Congressional Budget Office. During her eight-year term at the Congressional Budget Office, Banthin directed the production of numerous major cost estimates of legislative proposals to modify the ACA. Banthin has also conducted significant research on a wide range of topics such as the burdens of health care premiums and out-of-pocket costs on families, prescription drug spending, and employer and nongroup market premiums. She has special expertise in the design of microsimulation models for analyzing health insurance coverage and an extensive background in the design and use of household and employer survey data.

Senator MORAN. Now——

Senator DUCKWORTH. Did I take enough time?

Senator MORAN. You did. I should've just turned the——turned the page.

Again, I would thank all the witnesses for being here. I wanted to perhaps join Senator Cantwell in her remarks about people who work at airports. I'm a frequent traveler not—I guess it's by choice, but I live in Kansas and work here, and I'm in airports and on airplanes on a consistent basis like almost all of my colleagues. And during the shutdown, I found the employees at the airport, including the ones that Senator Cantwell mentioned, to be—I don't know about good spirits, but they were certainly polite, respectful, kind of we're all in this together kind of attitude. And again, it's something special, I suppose, about Americans and America at—in times of difficulty and adversity. There's still a common sense that we owe each other respect and try to make certain that the well-being of those who we care for is maintained, and I experienced that without exception. And so, I thank the folks who work at an airport and the people who work at the airlines and across the country. And just I worry that we're beginning to take these kind of circumstances as too commonplace, and they ought to be extraordinary and not the norm, but regardless of which one they are, I appreciate people who are polite and respectful.

Oh, let me see. Do I have something else I need to do on documents? OK. There are documents from the Modern Skies Coalition, the National Business Aviation Association, Boeing Aircraft, and one for the American Society of Traveler Advisors that I would ask to be placed in the record, and without objection, I would do so.

[The information referred to follows:]



**Modern Skies Coalition Urges Congress to Shield the Aviation Ecosystem from Government Shutdowns**

WASHINGTON, November 19, 2025 – Today, a broad coalition of aviation stakeholders released the statement below:

"As members of the Modern Skies Coalition, we urge Congress to ensure that our nation's aviation system and those who rely upon it are never subjected to another government shutdown.

Travelers, shippers and other users of the system pay nearly \$24 billion in taxes and fees every year for aviation operations, including air traffic control services, safety and security, and they deserve uninterrupted delivery of those services.

Our Coalition supports legislation that preserves the safety and operational integrity of the aviation ecosystem by protecting federal aviation workers and infrastructure. This includes ensuring that air traffic controllers, technicians, safety inspectors and certification personnel, TSA agents and CBP officers are compensated without interruption during a shutdown by drawing on monies already paid into the system by the users.

We strongly support Chairman Moran's bill (and the House companion bills introduced by Representatives Cohen and Bean) to shield the FAA from funding lapses by allowing the agency to draw from the Airport and Airway Trust Fund during a shutdown. We also strongly support the bill introduced by Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen which would draw on monies paid by aviation users to continue critical FAA functions.

There is no reason aviation should be subjected to shutdowns that result from Washington's inability to come to consensus on funding bills. Enough is enough. The time for this common sense and critical legislation is now."

*Aeronautical Repair Station Association  
Affordable Skies  
Airbus  
Airline Passenger Experience Association  
Air Line Pilots Association, International*

*Air Medical Operators Association  
Air Traffic Control Association  
Aircraft Electronics Association  
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association  
Airlines for America*

*Airports Council International – North America*  
*Allied Pilots Association*  
*Alpha Eta Rho*  
*American Association of Airport Executives*  
*American Institute of Aeronautics and*  
*Astronautics*  
*American Society of Travel Advisors*  
*Association for Uncrewed Vehicle Systems*  
*International*  
*Association of Air Medical Services*  
*Association of Flight Attendants-CWA*  
*Association of Professional Flight Attendants*  
*Association of Value Airlines*  
*Aviation Technical Education Council*  
*Cargo Airline Association*  
*Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations*  
*Experimental Aircraft Association*  
*GE Aerospace*  
*General Aviation Manufacturers Association*  
*Global Business Travel Association*  
*International Aircraft Dealers Association*  
*International Air Transport Association*  
*International Council of Air Shows*  
*International Flight Services Association*

*National Air Carrier Association*  
*National Air Traffic Controllers Association*  
*National Air Transportation Association*  
*National Association of State Aviation Officials*  
*National Business Aviation Association*  
*NetJets Association of Shared Aircraft Pilots*  
*Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, AFL-*  
*CIO*  
*RTCA*  
*Regional Air Cargo Carriers Association*  
*Recreational Aviation Foundation*  
*Regional Airline Association*  
*Southwest Airlines Pilots Association*  
*The Boeing Company*  
*Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO*  
*Transport Workers Union of America, AFL-CIO*  
*Travelers United*  
*United States Parachute Association*  
*United States Tour Operators Association*  
*U.S. Contract Tower Association*  
*U.S. Helicopter Safety Team*  
*U.S. Travel Association*  
*Vertical Aviation International*  
*Vertical Flight Society*

PREPARED STATEMENT OF ED BOLEN, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
NATIONAL BUSINESS AVIATION ASSOCIATION

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Duckworth, and Members of the Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation, thank you for holding this hearing to address the impact of the 43-day lapse in Federal funding on Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and Transportation Safety Administration (TSA) services and the national economy. On behalf of the National Business Aviation Association's (NBAA's) 11,000-member companies, I am honored to provide this testimony for the record.

I would like to start by thanking the dedicated public servants who shouldered a tremendous burden, showing up day after day without compensation to maintain the safety, security and efficiency of the national airspace system—without their commitment and professionalism, America's air transportation system and the national economy would have come to a halt.

**Business aviation is an important segment of the aviation industry.**

Business aviation is an indispensable part of the aviation ecosystem, providing an efficient, effective and flexible transportation solution to users. It is essential to America's economy and local communities supporting more than 1.3 million jobs and contributing \$339.2 billion per year in economic activity. General aviation helps businesses be more competitive, especially those small and mid-sized enterprises, headquartered in small towns and rural areas that have little or no airline service.

Business aviation also provides emergency medical transportation, and delivers humanitarian aid in times of need. Business aircraft provide around 15,000 relief flights each year, responding to natural disasters, transporting organs, and taking cancer patients to treatment centers. With 46.7 million Americans living more than an hour away from a Level 1 or 2 trauma center, business aviation is more critical than ever.

**The government shutdown impacted all segments of the aviation industry, including business and general aviation.**

The 43-day government shutdown stalled critical FAA work that impacted business and general aviation safety oversight, certification, training and operations; it impacted an industry that serves as a lifeline to rural economies, provides emergency medical transportation and delivers humanitarian aid in times of need.

The most severe impacts occurred on November 6, when the FAA implemented an Emergency Order to reduce *all* flight operations, including commercial *and* business aircraft operations, at 40 U.S. airports. Just days later, on November 10, the FAA implemented additional restrictions, banning non-scheduled operations at 12 airports, disproportionately impacting business aviation, an industry that drives local economies, connects communities, and supports humanitarian missions every day. General aviation complied with the emergency order and avoided operating at the Nation's busiest airports whenever possible to support the safety and efficiency of the system. The national airspace is a public resource open to all users. With the shutdown resolved, and moving forward, we ask Congress to ensure access remains equitable and available to every segment of the flying community.

Specifically, the government shutdown had a significant impact on business aviation as it delayed safety approvals, jeopardized investments, reduced safety margins, and restricted airspace capacity.

- The government shutdown forced the FAA to furlough safety inspectors, resulting in reduced services and significant delays to aviation businesses.
- The furloughs meant operators waited on certification approvals for more than a month which caused inefficient operations and prevented operators from using aircraft to their full capability.
- The furloughs halted new certification activities, resulting in certificate holders being unable to complete aircraft conformity checks, keeping some aircraft grounded.
- Inspectors did not approve revisions to manuals, delaying implementation of safety-enhancing procedures.
- Finally, furloughs meant inspectors were unable to review and approve the use of new training simulators, creating a backlog that will not begin to be addressed until March 2026 creating inefficiencies and sub-optimal safety.

**Business Aviation supports critical modernization efforts and funding stability.**

Congress must pass legislation to provide stable funding for the FAA during any future shutdown to mitigate harm to the safety and efficiency of the aviation system, the travelling public, and the national economy.

Long before the shutdown, Congress recognized that a modernized air traffic control system was a national imperative, essential to safety, and made an important down payment on needed reforms. The government shutdown threatened that progress and drew critical resources away from essential initiatives to expand controller hiring, improve training, and update technology and facilities. Business aircraft operators rely on a safe and efficient nation's air traffic control system and support a renewed focus and investment in these much needed reforms.

Congress must act now to ensure funding stability for the FAA, equitable airspace access and a returned focus on air traffic control modernization work.

- Congress must pass a full-year FY2026 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development appropriations bill to ensure continued investment in controller staffing, aviation safety personnel, technicians, and the modernization of critical aviation infrastructure.
- We urge Congress to approve legislation to ensure user-funded aviation services continue in the event of another government shutdown. Airspace users pay billions in taxes and fees to maintain air traffic control services, safety and security and deserve uninterrupted delivery of those services. Legislation such as Chairman Moran's *Funding Stability Act of 2025*, and *The Aviation Funding Solvency Act* introduced in the House would ensure these services are uninterrupted.
- Congress must continue its critical work on airspace modernization, strengthening the staffing, technology, infrastructure and facilities to build the best air traffic control system in the world, enabling safe and efficient air transportation.

Ending the government shutdown was an essential first step. Next, Congress must establish funding stability to ensure aviation services continue in the event of another government shutdown and return focus to modernizing the air traffic control system to maximize safety and efficiency in the national airspace system and strengthen the resilience of the American economy.

Thank you for your consideration. I appreciate the Committee's careful oversight of our Nation's aviation system and look forward to working with you to enhance aviation safety, improve the airspace system and maintain America's global leadership in aviation.



Jeff Shockey  
Executive Vice President  
Government Operations,  
Global Public Policy &  
Corporate Strategy

The Boeing Company  
929 Long Bridge Drive  
Arlington, VA 22202-4208

November 19, 2025

The Honorable Ted Cruz  
United States Senator  
167 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
United States Senator  
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tammy Duckworth  
United States Senator  
524 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cruz, Ranking Member Cantwell, Chairman Moran, and Ranking Member Duckworth,

On behalf of The Boeing Company, I commend the Committee for its continued leadership in ensuring the safety of our national airspace and the flying public. Thank you for convening this hearing to examine the impacts the recent government shutdown had on air traffic control, airline operations and the economy. As we begin the process of recovering from the effects of the shutdown, this discussion will be important to help minimize future disruptions to the operation of our airspace and our industry.

Throughout the recent shutdown, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy and FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford demonstrated thoughtful leadership in helping ensure that critical aviation safety, certification and air traffic control functions continued despite this extraordinarily challenging period. Their efforts, especially in combination with the professionalism and dedication of FAA employees nationwide – who came to work without pay – helped to minimize disruptions to our airspace and ensure safety. We owe them a great debt for their service and sacrifice over the course of the shutdown, and we should look for ways to ensure this does not happen again.

Looking ahead, I'd like to express the support of The Boeing Company for legislation that would ensure that, along with air traffic control, essential FAA safety and certification functions remain fully funded and employees are compensated during any future government shutdown. Safety inspectors and certification personnel are critical to the safety of our aviation system, and those workers deserve to be paid while carrying out their safety-critical responsibilities. Including these functions in any future continuity of pay provisions would strengthen the resilience of our nation's commercial aviation system and would help prevent long-term disruptions to industry and to public confidence in air travel.

Thank you for your continued leadership and effective oversight of the safety and reliability of America's aviation system.

Sincerely,

Jeff Shockey

AMERICAN SOCIETY OF TRAVEL ADVISORS  
*Alexandria, VA, November 18, 2025*

Hon. JERRY MORAN,  
 Chair,  
 Senate Subcommittee on Aviation,  
 Space, and Innovation,  
 Senate Committee on Commerce,  
 Science, and Transportation,  
 Washington, DC.

Hon. TAMMY DUCKWORTH,  
 Ranking Member,  
 Senate Subcommittee on Aviation,  
 Space, and Innovation,  
 Senate Committee on Commerce,  
 Science, and Transportation,  
 Washington, DC.

Re: Statement for the Record to the Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation: Subcommittee Hearing titled, "Flying on Empty: How Shutdowns Threaten Air Safety, Travel, and the Economy," on November 19, 2025.

Dear Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Duckworth and members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the more than 300,000 individuals working in the travel advisor profession, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record. We appreciate the Subcommittee's leadership in examining issues that affect travelers, the air transportation system, and the broader travel economy.

Travel advisors play a central and indispensable role in the global travel and tourism industry. ASTA's membership encompasses the full breadth of the marketplace from home-based entrepreneurs and traditional brick-and-mortar agencies to large travel management companies (TMCs) and online travel agencies. These professionals provide critical services to the traveling public, offering informed guidance, real-time problem solving, and dedicated assistance in the event of emergencies, disruptions, or unexpected changes in plans. Corporations rely on TMCs to manage their business travel programs efficiently and effectively, ensuring policy compliance and cost control while maintaining traveler safety and satisfaction.

With more than 300,000 travel advisors nationwide, nearly two-thirds of which are independent contractors, the profession represents a significant segment of the U.S. small business community. Ninety-five percent of travel agencies are small businesses under the SBA standard, and 80 percent are women-owned. In 2024, travel agencies sold 781,000 air tickets per day, totaling \$99.2 billion in annual airline sales, and were responsible for booking more than 66 percent of all cruises and tour packages. The profession booked \$119.3 billion in travel last year alone, with continued industry growth projected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Given this scale and economic importance, understanding the challenges faced by travel advisors during the government shutdown is essential to fully evaluating its effect on their businesses, U.S. travelers, and the broader travel economy.

In the final days of the longest Federal government shutdown in history, ASTA surveyed its members nationwide to assess the operational and economic impacts on both travel advisors and the travelers they serve. The results provide a clear and consistent picture of an industry under significant strain.

Travel advisors overwhelmingly reported increased workloads, heightened client anxiety, disrupted travel operations, and material impacts on their business performance. While the severity of the impact of the government shutdown varied, overall sentiment across the profession was decidedly negative.

The following summary of the impacts from the 43-day government shutdown on travelers and travel agencies presents a myriad of challenges and concerns to the travel industry. ASTA would welcome sharing the complete results of the research with the Subcommittee if it is of interest.

#### **Financial Impact on Travel Agencies and Advisors**

The most common theme expressed by advisors in the survey responses was a loss of income while their clients dealt with flight cancellations, national park restrictions and postponement of future travel. A large portion of survey respondents commented that travelers were postponing trips until the shutdown ended, or even until next year.

Travel advisors overwhelmingly reported that the shutdown created significant financial strain for their agencies, largely due to widespread flight disruptions that required hours of unpaid rebooking work and lost commissions when trips were canceled. Many advisors noted a sharp decline in new bookings, with clients delaying or abandoning travel plans entirely because of uncertainty, fear of being stranded, or financial stress from missed paychecks. For Federal government employees and contractors hit directly by loss of pay, even long-planned vacations were canceled in order to free up funds for basic living expenses.

Many travelers expected advisors to have answers that didn't exist given the day-to-day uncertainty around air traffic control staffing, TSA operations, and flight cancellations. This anxiety translated into a sharp decline in inquiries and bookings for many agencies, with sales for some agencies dropping to levels not seen since the pandemic. Advisors spent more time calming clients than creating new business, and many noted that they were doing dramatically more service work while earning less revenue.

In fact, nearly two-thirds reported clients delaying travel decisions. The hesitation spanned both leisure and business travelers and resulted in revenue drops averaging 25 percent for agencies. Overall, the shutdown shook consumer confidence, with many advisors reporting their phones had "gone silent" as clients adopted a wait-and-see approach. These dynamics suppressed travel demand and threatened long-term financial risk for small agencies.

#### **Travel Agency Operational Disruption**

More than seventy percent of advisors reported moderate or severe impacts on their business operations during the shutdown. Additionally, nearly eighty percent indicated they spent additional hours each week resolving shutdown-related issues, time that was largely uncompensated. While navigating crises for clients is part of the job, many advisors reported serving as a therapist to their clients, who were rightfully distressed about the possibility of missing an important client meeting, long-planned vacation, occupational conference, or a cruise departing from a distant port.

One comment from a travel agency owner summed up the sentiment voiced throughout the survey: "As a travel agency, we've definitely felt the ripple effects of the government shutdown. Air travel has become more unpredictable, with increased delays and limited staffing impacting both flight schedules and traveler confidence. Our team has spent much more time assisting clients with rebookings, schedule changes, and [offering] reassurance due to the uncertainty. Customer service has also been affected because many travelers are understandably anxious, and we're working harder to provide the support and communication they need. Overall, we've seen a slowdown in new bookings as clients hesitate to plan future travel until things feel more stable. It's been a challenging time, but we're staying proactive and doing everything we can to guide our clients through it."

#### **Stress on the Air Travel System**

Unsurprisingly, uncertainty around air travel represented the most significant disruption. Delays, cancellations, or rebookings for clients affected 83 percent of those responding. Travel advisors absorbed the brunt of traveler frustration as airlines and air traffic control faced capacity and staffing challenges. Government-mandated restrictions of flights across the system had immediate disruptive impacts resulting in fewer options to offer clients. These impacts continue to be sorted out in the days following the shutdown.

While advisors also reported disruptions to sales volume, customer service workloads, group tours and national park availability, air travel disruptions far exceeded the other concerns. The concentration on air travel issues reflects the role of the travel advisor on the front lines of the traveler experience. Advisors are absorbing the burden of airline disruption and uncertainty, which erodes efficiency and client satisfaction.

#### **Limited Federal Communication**

Advisors also reported little to no communication from Federal agencies during the shutdown, reducing their ability to provide accurate and timely guidance to travelers. In the absence of complete and comprehensive communication, advisors often relied upon anecdotal information and their own experiences to guide travelers.

With limited guidance from Federal agencies and constantly changing conditions, many advisors felt they were operating without reliable information, trying to reassure clients in an environment where facts shift daily. The industry spent far more time managing crises than selling travel, leading to concerns about long-term revenue health.

#### **Broader Industry Consequences**

More than sixty percent of respondents believed the shutdown produced ripple effects across the travel ecosystem, including concerns about consumer confidence, airline reliability, and the economic health of key travel-dependent destinations.

At the center of the disruption is the instability of the air travel system. When flights are delayed or canceled, travelers miss cruises, tours, hotel stays, meetings, and events, creating a chain reaction of rebookings, refunds, and lost revenue for

suppliers across the industry. Advisors described airports as chaotic and unpredictable, with limited information, long hold times, and inconsistent communication from both airlines and government agencies. This instability has eroded traveler confidence, which emerges as one of the most damaging industry-wide consequences.

As one respondent summed it up: “This shutdown is strangling our industry. Airports are chaos. Flights delayed. Passports and visas stalled. Conferences canceled. Small businesses are watching their income vanish overnight. The ripple effect is devastating—hotels, airlines, restaurants, drivers, guides, and local shops across the country are paying the price for Washington’s paralysis.”

### Policy Considerations

Travel advisors serve every congressional district and provide critical real-time support for millions of travelers. Based on the survey results, ASTA respectfully urges Congress to consider the following:

1. Prioritize stabilization of Federal travel infrastructure, particularly aviation systems heavily affected during government shutdowns.
2. Improve communication from Federal agencies to travel professionals who disseminate critical information to travelers.
3. Recognize travel advisors as essential partners in maintaining consumer confidence and navigating system-wide disruptions.
4. Include travel advisors in stakeholder discussions related to aviation reliability, shutdown impacts, and traveler-protection initiatives.

### Conclusion

While many advisors believe their own role becomes more valuable in moments like these, the consensus is clear: government shutdowns disrupt not just travel plans, but the fundamental functioning of and confidence in the entire travel industry. The government placed substantial operational, economic, and emotional burdens on travel advisors, the travelers they support and the greater travel economy. Advisors are working longer hours under immense pressure, managing elevated traveler concerns, and absorbing the effects of widespread travel disruptions. Despite these challenges, they continue to provide stability and expertise during a period of significant uncertainty.

We appreciate the Subcommittee’s time and consideration of our concerns, and stand ready to assist in your ongoing work. To that end, please don’t hesitate to contact ASTA Vice President, Advocacy, Jessica Klement at [jklement@asta.org](mailto:jklement@asta.org).

Sincerely,

ZANE KERBY,  
*President and CEO,*

American Society of Travel Advisors.

Senator MORAN. As a Kansan and someone that the state is hosting a FIFA and the Olympics coming up, and as Chair of the Congressional Senate Caucus on Travel and Tourism, we need the airlines fully operational and the travel industry capable of meeting significant demands as many international travelers will be visiting the United States, including Kansas City, in the near future.

I thank all of our witnesses for their testimony today. Senators on this committee will have until the close of business on November 26 to submit questions for the record, and the witnesses will have until the close of business on December the 10 to respond to those questions. What that means is my colleagues and I may ask you questions in writing, and then if you would respond to those questions to—for the satisfaction of those senators and for the Committee record by the December the 10, that is what we would ask you to do.

And that concludes today’s hearing, and the Committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:06 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

## A P P E N D I X

RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. JACKY ROSEN TO  
NICK DANIELS

### **Question Topic: Shutdown Impacts on ATC Workforce Pipeline**

During the 44-day government shutdown—the longest in our Nation’s history—Nevada’s Federal aviation workforce, including air traffic controllers (ATC) and TSA personnel, worked for weeks without pay. Fortunately, our airports and local organizations stepped up to support our workers. For example, the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority partnered with The Children’s Cabinet and the Northern Nevada Food Bank to provide essential support, from food to household necessities.

*Question 1.* From your perspective, despite these critically important community efforts, how has the economic and emotional strain of the shutdown affected morale, retention, and the future pipeline of skilled aviation personnel?

Answer. The National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) is extremely thankful for the efforts in Nevada through the partnership that included the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority to provide essential support for air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals who worked without pay during the shutdown. NATCA is also grateful for the countless other organizations who provided support across the country for these dedicated patriotic Federal workers. Groups like the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA), the Southwest Airlines Pilots Association (SWAPA), and the NetJets Association of Shared Aircraft Pilots (NJASAP), and many individual airlines stood in solidarity and provided food and other forms of support during the shutdown.

NATCA has always been concerned about the risks inherent in a government shutdown and the compounding negative effects a shutdown has on aviation safety, the U.S. economy, and the morale of the frontline workforce that safeguards the National Airspace System (NAS) every day. Government shutdowns—of any length—are incredibly stressful and distracting for the nearly 20,000 air traffic controllers and other aviation safety professionals NATCA represents, the vast majority of whom worked without pay during the shutdown. This is not acceptable and not sustainable.

Nevertheless, during the shutdown, controllers continued to show up and step up for the American flying public and each other, deftly performing their safety-critical functions at the highest level despite operating 3,800 fully certified controllers short of the Federal Aviation Administration’s (FAA) staffing target.

It was incredibly unfair to expect hard-working, patriotic American air traffic controllers and their families to bear the full burden of policy disagreements in Congress. Increased stress decreased morale, personally, for controllers and their families who were enduring the effects of the shutdown as much as they were. Morale was also harmed as the workforce struggled financially to pay for rent, food, utilities, and childcare to make ends meet. The reality is that these professionals were required to oversee the movement of the Nation’s passengers and cargo while many continued to work ten-hour days and six-day workweeks due to the ongoing staffing shortage, all without pay. All of these factors compounded to decrease morale.

In spite of this, even as they went without pay during the record-long government shutdown, America’s air traffic controllers remained steadfast in their commitment to ensuring the safety and efficiency of the National Airspace System.

Although stress, financial insecurity, and decreased morale led to some unanticipated attrition among these professionals, NATCA does not have any specific data on how many controllers retired or resigned as a direct result of the shutdown. However, NATCA is extremely grateful to Department of Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy who kept the FAA’s controller hiring and training pipeline open during the shutdown. In fact, for the first time ever, Secretary Duffy directed the FAA to continue hiring and training controller candidates at the FAA’s Academy in Oklahoma City during the shutdown, thereby ensuring controller staffing would not be as negatively affected unlike previous shutdowns.

*Question 2.* What long-term impacts could we see on ATC and TSA workforce retention, and what policy solutions should Congress consider to ensure that talented young people continue to pursue careers in the Federal aviation workforce?

Answer. Currently, NATCA is not aware of any long-term impacts to the ATC workforce in terms of recruitment or retention. However, the FAA was already operating near a 30-year low in terms of fully certified professional controllers: 3,800 controllers short of its staffing target.

The controller workforce has been understaffed for more than a decade, resulting in mandatory overtime, including regular 10-hour days and six-day weeks. Last year, controllers at 40 percent of FAA facilities worked six days a week at least once per month. Several facilities require six-day workweeks every week. The FAA and NATCA are acutely aware of these thin staffing margins and the compounding effects they have on controller stress and fatigue.

Retention efforts could become more challenging in the future if controllers elect to retire when first eligible, rather than waiting until age 56 mandatory retirement. However, recent efforts in Congress to raise the mandatory retirement age for controllers beyond age 56 would not solve the current staffing crisis. Earlier this year, there were fewer than 50 controllers across only 32 facilities who would have reached age 56 within a year. Therefore, permitting controllers to work past age 56 would not have a meaningful effect on current controller staffing challenges.

NATCA thanks this Committee for its work to address the shortage in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. It not only updated FAA's controller staffing targets, but it also requires the FAA to hire the maximum number of controller trainees for five years and deploy tower simulator systems to every FAA tower to improve training. This Committee must continue its oversight role to ensure that the requirements it established come to fruition.

Additionally, NATCA supports S. 1985—the Safe Operations of Shared Airspace Act of 2025, which would, among other things, improve controller training and extend FAA's max hiring requirements contained in the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 for an additional five years.

Finally, NATCA continues to strongly support Secretary Duffy's plan to supercharge the hiring of controller trainees to bring in the best and brightest controller candidates.

It is through these types of consistent, intentional, and sustained hiring and training efforts that we will begin to approach improved controller staffing numbers for years to come.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY HON. JACKY ROSEN TO  
GOVERNOR CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU

*Question Topic:* Impact of Trump Policies on International Air Travel

The Trump Administration's policies have been undermining international travel and tourism for the past year. More visitors come to Las Vegas from Canada every year than from any other country across the globe. But thanks to Trump's tariffs, Canadian air travel to Las Vegas is down more than a third year-over-year. That is in addition to a 13 percent overall drop in international visitors—all of whom must decide whether or not to travel to the U.S. amidst a backdrop of foreign travelers being detained at airports, tariffs raising costs and undermining trade with our allies, and new fees that make international travel more expensive—like the \$250 "visa integrity fee" created by the so-called "One Big Beautiful Bill Act".

*Question 1.* Governor Sununu, can you talk about the impact these policies are having on air travel to the United States and how Congress should work to mitigate them in order to promote international travel and tourism?

Answer. A4A, and our members, continue to support and are actively collaborating with Federal partners to drive both policies and investment that will benefit the travel and tourism industry. Travel and tourism investment will play a critical role in accommodating upcoming global events like the 2026 FIFA World Cup and America 250, amongst many others.

Additionally, maintaining and promoting the deregulatory policies that have democratized air travel to the benefit of both domestic and international travelers will be key to growing and promoting international tourism. We support the Department of Transportation's deregulatory agenda and directives, which squarely align with Congress's nearly 50-year mandate for a deregulated airline industry. The successes of the Airline Deregulation Act of 1978 (ADA) are undeniable, including a diversity of airline businesses that provide consumers with record air travel and cargo choices, as well as unprecedented affordability that allows more people to fly than

ever before. Straying from these bedrock deregulatory principles or insisting on more regulatory controls will only create barriers for travel and tourism.

However, the most material and impactful threats to a robust travel, tourism and aviation sector that need immediate mitigation and action are—

- *Ensuring the Aviation System Is Not Harmed by Government Shutdowns*—The most recent government shutdown clearly demonstrated the serious safety, human and economic consequences of subjecting the aviation sector to unnecessary stress and chaos. It must never happen again. Congress should take immediate actions to:
  - *Short-term*: Pass the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bills to make sure the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are not subject to shutdown impacts for the rest of FY 2026; and
  - *Durable Solution*: Identify and enact solutions that will ensure the FAA, TSA and CBP are insulated from the impacts of any future lapses in appropriations, ensuring their employees can continue their work uninterrupted and with pay. Options include, but are not limited to, S. 1045 and H.R. 6086 that both guarantee that essential Federal workers are paid for their essential work during any future government shutdown.
- *Addressing the Air Traffic Controller Shortage*. The ongoing air traffic controller staffing shortage, which was an acute issue prior to the shutdown and will only be exacerbated by the long-term impacts of the most recent shutdown. Beginning in October 2023, airlines reduced their flying from the New York metropolitan area by 10 percent to accommodate the lack of controller staffing at critical facilities.

Additionally, in November 2024, the Department of Transportation Inspector General (DOT IG) put out its DOT Top Management Challenges report. That report states:

“ . . . FAA has not ensured adequate controller staffing at its most critical facilities. For example, we (IG) found that 20 of 26 critical facilities were staffed below the Agency’s threshold of 85 percent.”

“FAA’s implementation of pauses in air traffic controller training during the COVID–19 pandemic contributed to controller staffing challenges by resulting in an increase in certification times for controllers. FAA needs improved resiliency in staffing and contingency planning for disruptions, and our audit work shows that FAA’s lack of a plan to address *these staffing challenges limits the capacity of the NAS.*”

Congress should work collaboratively with the Administration to execute, implement and invest in Secretary of Transportation Duffy’s plans to “supercharge” air traffic controller hiring.

- *Building the Brand New Air Traffic Control System*. The U.S. ATC system is very safe, but the lack of government action has made it inefficient, antiquated and far from the “gold standard” Americans deserve. Unnecessary travel delays cost the U.S. economy and passengers more than \$30 billion annually. These delays are the direct result of systemwide ATC inefficiencies resulting from the use of outdated, World War II-era radar technology. Controllers are still using paper strips to control traffic instead of electronic strips. Some computer system updates are done with floppy disks. Flights between Washington, D.C., and New York used to take 55 minutes, but to account for air traffic delays and inefficiencies, these flights are now scheduled to take 80 minutes or longer. Despite being a vital part of U.S. economic infrastructure, our airspace and the technology that supports it are the modern equivalent of driving a horse and buggy on a gravel road. This lack of efficiency and the resulting reduced capacity directly and negatively impacts carriers’ ability to grow and compete and robs consumers and the economy of growth, jobs, tourism and related benefits.

The aviation sector strongly supported Congress’s \$12.5 billion downpayment toward air traffic control modernization that was included in the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” and we continue to advocate for at least an additional \$19 billion that will be needed to completely build a new air traffic control system.

Fixing these fundamental government problems and challenges will provide the necessary stability and predictability needed to accommodate and grow the travel

and tourism sector and will benefit every member of the traveling and shipping public.

**Question Topic: Impact of FAA Reduction Order**

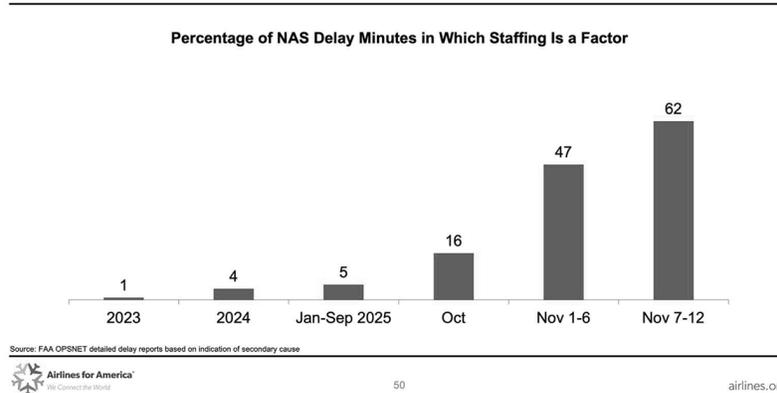
The FAA recently mandated flight reductions of up to six percent at our busiest airports due to air traffic controller shortages that were worsened by the government shutdown. Airlines were forced to adjust tens of thousands of daily flights, directly affecting passenger travel and creating significant operational and financial strain.

*Question 1.* Mr. Sununu, in your view, how have these travel disruptions impacted airline operations, passenger confidence, and the broader aviation system?

Answer. The data from this most recent shutdown shows the material impact and real-world consequences of extended shutdowns and will hopefully convince policy-makers that we should never subject our air traffic control system to this chaos again.

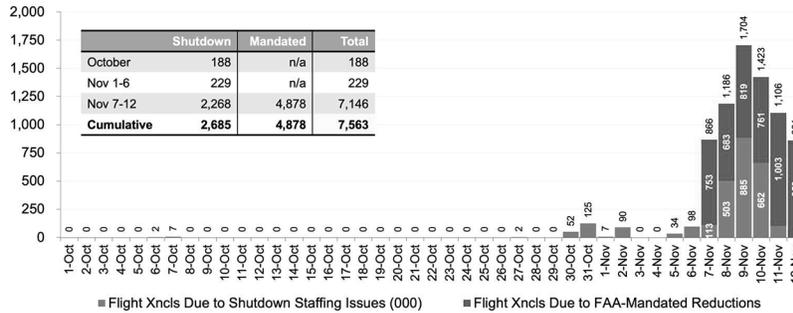
*Controller Staffing Triggers and Operational Limitations.* According to FAA data, controller staffing issues contributed to 5 percent of National Airspace System (NAS) delay minutes from January through September, jumping to 16 percent in October and 62 percent in November. Over 6 million A4A member airline passengers were affected during the shutdown.

**Staffing Issues Are Increasingly Contributing to National Airspace System (NAS) Delays**



Many of the disruptions faced by passengers between October 1 and early November were a function of controller staffing-driven flight delays. During that period, A4A airlines incurred over 30,000 staffing-related delays but were able to minimize cancellations to about 400 (<0.1 percent). This shutdown disrupted 3.7 million passengers in that time period and pushed the airlines to scramble to minimize customer impacts. The air traffic controller staffing issues then led to an unprecedented shutdown consequence where the FAA issued an Emergency Order (Order #1) directing air carriers to reduce domestic schedule operations across the NAS at 40 airports. Specifically, Order #1 directed a 4 percent reduction in operations on Friday, November 7, ramping up to 6 percent by November 11, 8 percent by November 13 and 10 percent by November 14. On November 12, citing substantial and rapid improvement in facility staffing conditions, the FAA issued a new Emergency Order (Order #2), which superseded Order #1. Order #2 modified the operational limitation escalation to 6 percent. From November 7—the first day of the FAA-mandated flight-schedule reductions—through November 12, A4A airlines incurred more than 15,600 staffing-related delays and more than 7,100 staffing-related flight cancellations, disrupting 2.3 million passengers.

**A4A Member Airlines: Flight Cancellations Attributable to Controller Staffing Issues**  
 October 1-November 12, 2025



Source: A4A summary of data provided by Alaska Airlines, American Airlines, Delta Air Lines, JetBlue Airways, Southwest Airlines and United Airlines  
 Airlines for America | 52 | airlines.org

The operational reduction percentages may seem trivial to the average observer, but when put into context they are extreme. On November 12, for example, 99.8 percent of the 861 staffing-related cancellations were attributable to FAA-mandated flight reductions at 40 airports. For perspective, *in November 2024*, data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics show that *U.S. airlines canceled just 0.46 percent of scheduled flights—across all categories of causation, including NAS issues*. Promulgating a cancellation rate of 6 percent for several consecutive days, if not longer, for ATC staffing reasons alone, without a chance for operations to recover, is highly disruptive to our customers and takes a toll on our frontline employees—at the airport, on the plane, on our help desks, etc. At the 40 target airports, applying the 6 percent directive translates to approximately 875 cancellations and 60,000 disrupted passengers *per day which is more than 13 times the normal rate*.

A4A estimates that if Order #1 would have reached the original 10 percent threshold, by November 14, the daily average toll on the U.S. economy would have reached as much as \$580 million depending on the degree to which airlines could reaccommodate cancellation-disrupted passengers on the remaining flights.

Of note, that economic impact estimate is tied solely to compliance with the flight-reduction directive, and it does not include the costs associated with the value of passenger time, reduced bookings, passenger refunds, etc. It does include indirect and induced impacts tied to reduced visitor spending, state and local tax revenue and spending across the broader economy as individuals within and outside the aviation supply chain curtailed expenditures.

The air traffic controller staffing crisis also triggered broad secondary impacts. In many instances, even those passengers who successfully reach their destination encountered long departure delays, extended tarmac times and highly unpredictable arrival times. For the airlines, many flight crews were timing out (per regulated limits) or missing connections because of late aircraft arrivals and equipment mis-positioning.

For the controller staffing issues in particular, unlike weather-driven disruptions, each controller shift change or facility staffing trigger could result in added hours of delay with no advance notice, undermining the airlines' ability to plan, staff or accommodate impacted customers.

Despite airline mitigations, it created mass disruptions and should serve as an example of the real-world economic and human impact of a government shutdown. This simply should never happen again, and it is most certainly preventable.

*Question 2.* Looking forward, what specific steps can airlines and the FAA take collaboratively—such as workforce planning, accelerated training, investment in advanced traffic management technologies, or operational coordination—to address the underlying air traffic controller shortage and ensure that the air travel system can safely and efficiently handle peak demand, even during unexpected crises?

*Answer.* The most recent shutdown distinctly showed the lengths at which the FAA and the aviation community will go to collaborate and maintain safety in the system. A4A welcomes opportunities to collaborate with the FAA, but ATC staffing

is a uniquely governmental responsibility that can only be addressed through government action.

A4A supports an “all-of-the-above approach.” Every facet of the controller recruitment, retention, training, staffing and hiring framework should be analyzed for better efficiency and effectiveness.

A4A also supports DOT Secretary Duffy’s ATC staffing “supercharge” effort to hire at least 8,900 new air traffic controllers through 2028.

In addition to fully utilizing and expanding the capacity of the FAA Academy through the efforts above, A4A supports the FAA’s expansion of the Air Traffic-Collegiate Training Initiative (AT-CTI) program which provides a strategic pathway to increase the hiring capacity for air traffic controllers. As the FAA reestablishes and expands the AT-CTI program, A4A supports the FAA establishing and certifying a program that allows applicants to graduate and go directly to on-the-job training at air traffic towers, Terminal Radar Approach Control (TRACONs) and Air Route Traffic Control Center (ARTCC) facilities across the country.

Congress and the Administration need to coordinate and establish a governance and funding system that will provide stable and predictable funding to holistically address the controller shortage. A4A is not alone with these recommendations, as we are part of an unprecedented, industry-wide broad aviation community coalition established earlier this year, the “Modern Skies Coalition,” which wholeheartedly endorses “supercharging” air traffic controller hiring.

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RESPONSE TO WRITTEN QUESTION SUBMITTED BY HON. JACKY ROSEN TO  
JAMES A. VIOLA

**Question Topic: FAA Recovery from Shutdown Impacts**

*Question 1.* Mr. Viola, your testimony has several suggestions on ways FAA can manage the backlog from shutdown to expedite recovery. Can you elaborate on that?

Answer. Thank you for the opportunity to elaborate on ways that FAA can manage the backlog created by the recent government shutdown. My response is focused on two areas: the FAA’s ability to hire the workforce needed to provide safety oversight and the ability of existing employees to have flexibility to utilize their Personal Time Off (PTO) into 2026.

A significant concern involves the approximately 600 engineers, pilots, inspectors, and technical specialists that AVS was actively hiring when the shutdown began. These candidates were left in limbo and may now decide not to pursue Federal employment. It takes 6–12 months to train a new certification engineer before they can just start to be productive. It is a multi-year process to qualify a new flight test pilot. This highlights the compounding effect of lost time and lost applicants. It isn’t a six-week disruption, it’s a multi-year set back, particularly for highly technical and unique skills such as structural loads, software, hybrid propulsion, system safety, and flight test pilots.

For these highly technical safety positions, direct-hire authority is one of the FAA’s most effective tools for attracting, rebuilding and sustaining the specialized technical talent pipeline and ensuring the agency can meet its safety mission, support U.S. innovation, and uphold global aviation leadership. The FAA competes directly with manufacturers, technical firms, and global aerospace companies for the same highly skilled professionals, and industry hires in days while the traditional Federal hiring process can take months. Direct-hire authority allows the FAA to recruit in weeks instead of losing top candidates to faster-moving employers. Several of these direct-hire authorities for engineers, pilots, and inspectors expire at the end of this year so we recommend that this be extended or permanently implemented for these highly specialized safety positions particularly given the shutdown.

FAA workforce availability is also essential to effectively and efficiently work through the backlog of activities that build up during the shutdown and restoring U.S. aviation business activities and competitiveness in product development, innovation, manufacturing, and global exports. Given the amount of change and uncertainty for the Federal workforce this year, further exacerbated by the six weeks of shutdown, one of the greatest challenges and significant risk to recovery is the backlog of the individual personal time off (PTO) “use-or-lose” annual leave benefit which must be used by January 10, 2026, or be forfeited. Consistent with what was implemented following the 2018–2019 shutdown, we recommend that the Administration extend the ability for Federal employees to use their earned PTO annual leave benefit at least to the end of CY2026 so that the FAA does not face a signifi-

cant workforce shortage when they are needed most for starting to make up for lost ground.

