

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2025

Remarks on the Collision of a United States Army Helicopter and an American Airlines Aircraft Near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport and an Exchange With Reporters

January 30, 2025

Q. Mr. President, welcome.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you.

I'd like to request a moment of silence for the victims and their families, please.

[At this point, a moment of silence was observed.]

Thank you very much.

I speak to you this morning in an hour of anguish for our Nation. Just before 9 p.m. last night, an American Airlines regional jet carrying 60 passengers and 4 crew collided with an Army Black Hawk helicopter carrying 3 military servicemembers over the Potomac River in Washington, DC, while on final approach to Reagan National Airport. Both aircraft crashed instantly and were immediately submerged into the icy waters of the Potomac. Real tragedy.

The massive search and rescue mission was underway throughout the night, leveraging every asset at our disposal. And I have to say, the local, State, Federal, military—including the United States Coast Guard, in particular—they've done a phenomenal job. So quick. So fast. It was mobilized immediately.

The work has now shifted to a recovery mission. Sadly, there are no survivors.

This was a dark and excruciating night in our Nation's Capital and in our Nation's history, and a tragedy of terrible proportions. As one Nation, we grieve for every precious soul that has been taken from us so suddenly, and we are a country of—really, we are in mourning. This has really shaken a lot of people, including people, very sadly, from other nations who were on the flight.

For the family members back in Wichita, Kansas, here in Washington, DC, and throughout the United States, and in Russia—we have a Russia contingent of very talented people unfortunately were on that plane—very, very, very sorry about that—whose loved ones were aboard the passenger jet, we can only begin to imagine the agony that you're all feeling. Nothing worse.

On behalf of the First Lady, myself, and 340 million Americans, our hearts are shattered, alongside yours, and our prayers are with you now and in the days to come. We'll be working very, very diligently in the days to come. We're here for you to wipe away the tears and to offer you our devotion, our love, and our support—there's great support.

In moments like this, the differences between Americans fade to nothing compared to the bonds of affection and loyalty that unite us all, both as Americans and even as nations. We are one family. And today we are all heartbroken. We're all searching for answers. That icy, icy Potomac—that was a cold, cold night, cold water.

We're all overcome with the grief for many who have so tragically perished, who will no longer be with us. Together, we take solace that their journey ended not in the cold waters of the Potomac but in the warm embrace of a loving god.

We do not know what led to this crash, but we have some very strong opinions and ideas, and I think we'll probably state those opinions now, because over the years, I've watched as things like this happen and they say, "Well, we're always investigating." And then the investigation 3 years later—they announce it, "We think we have—have some pretty good ideas." But we'll find out how this disaster occurred, and we'll ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

The FAA and the NTSB and the U.S. military will be carrying out a systematic and comprehensive investigation. Our new Secretary of Transportation, Sean Duffy—his second day on the job, when that happened—that's a rough one—will be working tirelessly. He's a great gentleman. A whole group is—these are great people, and they are working tirelessly to figure out exactly what happened. We'll—we will state certain opinions, however.

I'm also immediately appointing an Acting Commissioner to the FAA, Christopher Rocheleau, a 22-year veteran of the agency, highly respected. Christopher, thank you very much. Appreciate it.

We must have only the highest standards for those who work in our aviation system. I changed the Obama standards from very mediocre at best to extraordinary—you remember that—only the highest aptitude; they have to be the highest intellect and psychologically superior people—were allowed to qualify for air traffic controllers. That was not so prior to getting there, when I arrived in 2016.

I made that change very early on because I always felt this was a job that—and other jobs, too—but this was a job that had to be superior intelligence. And we didn't really have that, and we had it.

And then when I left office and Biden took over, he changed them back to lower than ever before. I put safety first. Obama, Biden, and the Democrats put policy first. And they put politics at a level that nobody has ever seen, because this was the lowest level. Their policy was horrible, and their politics was even worse.

So, as you know, last week, long before the crash, I signed an Executive order restoring our highest standards for air traffic controllers and other important jobs throughout the country.

So it was very interesting. About a week ago, almost upon entering office, I signed something last week that was an Executive order—a very powerful in restoring the highest standards of air traffic controllers—and others, by the way.

And my administration will set the highest possible bar for aviation safety. We have to have our smartest people. It doesn't matter what they look like, how they speak, who they are. It matters—intellect, talent—the word "talent." They have to be talented, naturally talented geniuses.

You can't have regular people doing that job. They won't be able to do it.

But we'll restore faith in American air travel. I'll have more to say about that.

I do want to point out that—various articles that appeared prior to my entering office, and here's one: the "FAA's diversity push includes focus on hiring people with 'severe intellectual' and 'psychiatric' disabilities." That is amazing.

And then it says, "FAA says people with 'severe' disabilities are most underrepresented segment of the workforce." And they want them in, and they want them—they can be air traffic controllers. I don't think so. This was a—in January 14, so that was a week before I entered office. They put a big push to put diversity into the FAA's program.

Then another article, "The Federal Aviation Administration"—this was before I got to office recently, the second term. "The FAA is actively recruiting workers who suffer 'severe intellectual'

disabilities, psychiatric problems, and other mental and physical conditions under a diversity and inclusion hiring initiative spelled out on the agency's website."

Can you imagine? These are people that are—I mean, actually, their lives are shortened because of the stress that they have. Brilliant people have to be in those positions, and their lives are actually shortened—very substantially shortened—because of the stress. When you have many, many planes coming into one target, and you need a very special talent and a very special genius to be able to do it.

"Targeted disabilities are those disabilities that the Federal Government, as a matter of policy, has identified for special emphasis in recruitment and hiring,' the FAA's website states. 'They include hearing, vision, missing extremities, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, epilepsy, severe intellectual disability, psychiatric disability, and dwarfism.'" All qualify for the position of a controller of airplanes pouring into our country, pouring into a little spot, a little dot on the map, a little runway.

"The initiative is part of the FAA's 'Diversity and Inclusion' hiring plan." Think of that. "The initiative is part of the FAA's 'Diversity and Inclusion' hiring plan, which says 'diversity is integral to achieving FAA's mission of ensuring safe and efficient travel.'" I don't think so. I don't think so. I think it's just the opposite.

"The FAA website shows that the agency's guidelines on diversity hiring were last updated on March 23 of '22." They wanted to make it ever more so, and then I came in. And I assume maybe this is the reason.

"The FAA, which is overseen by Secretary Pete Buttigieg"—a real winner. That's a guy who's a real winner. Do you know how badly everything was run since he's run this Department of Transportation? He's a disaster. He was a disaster as a mayor. He ran his city into the ground. And he's a disaster now. He's just got a good line of bullshit. The "Department of Transportation is a government agency charged with regulating civil aviation." Well, he runs it—45,000 people—and he's run it right into the ground with his diversity. So I had to say that it's terrible.

Then it's—"A group within the FAA"—another story—"determined that the workforce was too White," that they had "concerted efforts" to get the administration to change that and to change it immediately. This was in the Obama administration, just prior to my getting there.

And we took care of African Americans, Hispanic Americans. We took care of everybody at levels that nobody has ever seen before. It's one of the reasons I won.

But they actually came out with a directive: "too White." And we want the people that are competent.

But now we mourn, and we pray. And I would like to ask all Americans to join me in a moment of silence as we ask God to watch over those who have lost their lives and bring comfort to the loved ones.

And I just want to say God bless everyone in this room.

This has been a terrible very short period of time. We'll get to the bottom of it.

So we all saw the same thing. We've seen it many times. I've had the honor of hearing tapes. The tapes are scary—very scary tapes.

You had a airliner coming in—American Airlines. He was doing everything right. He was on track. He used the same track as everybody else that came in. It's probably the same track as they've had for 25 years or more. He's coming in the path, and, for some reason, you had a helicopter that was at the same height—obviously, when they hit, but pretty much the same height and going at an angle that was unbelievably bad.

When the air traffic controller said, "Do you see"—you know, he was talking about "Do you see him?" But there was very little time left when that was stated.

And then, also, he said, "Follow him in." And then almost immediately after that—you know, seconds after that—there was the crash that took place. Well, you follow him in—that means, like, "Everything's fine. Follow him in."

You had a pilot problem from the standpoint of the helicopter—I mean, because it was visual. It was a very clear night. It was cold, but clear—and clear as you could be. The American Airlines plane had lights blazing. They had all their landing lights on.

I could see it from the Kennedy Center tape. We had a tape up on the Kennedy Center that seems to be the primary thus far. I'm sure we'll see other tapes, because it's such a—an area where there—lot of cameras—a lot of cameras looking up in space—into the air, into space. So, we'll probably see many other shots of it before too much time goes by.

But we had a situation where you had a helicopter that had the ability to stop. I have helicopters. You can stop a helicopter very quickly. It had the ability to go up or down. It had the ability to turn.

And the turn it made was not the correct turn, obviously, and it did somewhat the opposite of what it was told. We don't know that that would have been the difference, because the timing was so tight. It was so—it was so little—there was so little time to think.

But what you did have is, you had vision. The helicopter had vision of the plane, because you had vision of it all the way—perfect vision of it all the way from—at Kennedy Center, where the tape was taken. And for some reason, there weren't adjustments made.

Again, you could have slowed down the helicopter substantially. You could have stopped the helicopter. You could have gone up. You could have gone down. You could have gone straight up, straight down. You could have turned. You could have done a million different maneuvers.

For some reason, it just kept going and then made a slight turn at the very end. And it was—by that time, it was too late.

They shouldn't have been at the same height, because if it wasn't the same height, you could have gone under it or over it. And nobody realized or they didn't say that it's at the same height. At the same height would—it would—still wouldn't have been great, but you would have missed it by quite a bit. It could have been a thousand feet higher. It could have been 200 feet lower. But it was exactly at the same height, and somebody should have been able to point that out.

So all of this is going to be studied, but it just seems to me—from a couple of words that I like to use, the words "common sense." Some really bad things happened, and some things happened that shouldn't have happened.

So you had a helicopter going in identical direction. You had a helicopter that was at the exact same height as somebody going in essentially the opposite direction. You had a plane that was following a track, which is a track that every other plane followed.

And I don't imagine—I know I've heard today that they might have been following the preceding plane—which was pretty close, but not that close—the preceding plane. But you wouldn't have even been able to see that because of the direction that the helicopter was coming in at.

So you had a confluence of bad decisions that were made, and you have people that lost their lives—violently lost their lives.

We're going to take a few questions. I'd like to ask our new Secretary of Transportation to say a few words—Sean Duffy, a great gentleman. Just started. It's not your fault. And I know you agree with me very strongly on intellect and even the psychological well-being of—of the air traffic controllers. Such an important position.

And I think I can't emphasize stronger: I changed it when I first ran. In 2016, I changed it. We had the highest standard that you could have. And then they changed it back—that was Biden—to a standard you just—I read it to you. That was from one of your papers—one of the people in this room actually wrote that. And then I changed it back a few days ago. And unfortunately, that was—we'll see.

We don't know that necessarily it's even the controller's fault. But one thing we do know: There was a lot of vision, and people should have been able to see that—you know, at what point do you stop? At what point you say, "Wow, that plane is getting a little bit close"?

So this is a tragedy that should not have happened.

Please, Sean.

Secretary of Transportation Sean P. Duffy. Thank you, Mr. President.

And I would just note: The President's leadership has been remarkable during this crisis. We have had a whole-of-government response—local, State, Federal. And when you see that kind of cooperation, it begins with the leadership in this body. So thank you for that, Mr. President. You make our jobs a lot easier.

You made an important point that when we deal with safety, we can only accept the best and the brightest in positions of safety that impact the lives of our loved ones, our family members. And I think you make a really important point on that, Mr. President. That is the motto of your Presidency: "The best and the brightest." The most intelligent coming into these spaces.

I want to take a moment and extend my condolences to the families of the loved ones. We commit to them that we are going to get to the bottom of this investigation—not in 3 years, not in 4 years, but as quickly as possible—with the NTSB, who is here today, as well as the FAA.

What happened yesterday shouldn't have happened. It should not have happened. And when Americans take off in airplanes, they should expect to land at their destination. That didn't happen yesterday. That's not acceptable.

And so we will not accept excuses. We will not accept passing the buck. We are going to take responsibility at the Department of Transportation and the FAA to make sure we have the reforms that have been dictated by President Trump in place to make sure that these mistakes do not happen again.

And, again, I want to thank you for your leadership, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you very much.

Secretary Duffy. And I appreciate the confidence you've placed in me.

The President. Thank you very much.

Pete, would you like to say something?

Secretary of Defense Peter B. Hegseth. Sure.

Well, thank you, Mr. President. Again, I want to echo what the Transportation secretary said about your leadership. From the moment we found out about this, we were in contact with the White House trying to determine exactly what happened. I would echo as well: No excuses. We're going to get to the bottom of this.

We, first and foremost, from the Defense Department, want to pass our condolences to the 64 souls and their families that were affected by this—never should have happened—and certainly, the three servicemembers, the three soldiers—a young captain, a staff sergeant, and a CW2—chief warrant officer—on a routine, annual retraining of night flights on a standard corridor for a continuity of government mission.

The military does dangerous things. It does routine things on the regular basis. Tragically, last night, a mistake was made. And I think the President is right. There was an—some sort of an elevation issue that we have immediately begun investigating at the DOD and Army level. Army CID is on the ground investigating, top-tier aviation assets inside the DOD are investigating, sir, to get to the bottom of it so that it does not happen again, because it's absolutely unacceptable.

But I want to echo what the Transportation Secretary and you, Mr. President, said, because it pertains to the DOD as well: We will have the best and brightest in every position possible.

As you said in your Inaugural, it is color-blind and merit-based—the best leaders possible, whether it's flying Black Hawks, flying airplanes, leading platoons, or in Government. The era of DEI is gone at the Defense Department, and we need the best and brightest, whether it's in our air traffic control or whether it's in our generals or whether it's throughout Government.

So thank you for your leadership and courage—

The President. Thank you.

Secretary Hegseth. ——on that, sir. And we'll stand by you on it. Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much.

J.D., please.

Vice President James D. "J.D." Vance. Well, thank you, Mr. President, for your leadership. I just want to reemphasize something the President said and—and you've heard from the Secretary of Transportation and of Defense: There really was a whole-of-government response. We were all on the phone. We were all communicating yesterday, trying to get to the bottom of this immediately, but also try to communicate with the American people about what happened.

Something the President said that I think bears reemphasizing, which is that when you don't have the best standards in who you're hiring, it means, on the one hand, you're not getting the best people in Government, but on the other hand, it puts stresses on the people who are already there. And I think that is a core part of what President Trump is going to bring and has already brought to Washington, DC, is we want to hire the best people because we want the best people at air traffic control, and we want to make sure we have enough people at air traffic control who are actually competent to do the job.

If you go back to just some of the headlines over the past 10 years, you have many hundreds of people suing the Government because they would like to be air traffic controllers, but they were turned away because of the color of their skin. That policy ends under Donald Trump's leadership because safety is the first priority of our aviation industry.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. Thank you, J.D.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Air Traffic Control System

Q. Mr. President—Mr. President, on DEI—on DEI and the claims that you've made. Are you saying this crash was somehow caused and the result of diversity hiring? And what evidence have you seen to support these claims?

The President. It just could have been. We have a high standard. We've had a higher—much higher standard than anybody else. And there are things where you have to go by brain power. You have to go by psychological quality. And psychological quality is a very important element of it. These are various very powerful tests that we put to use, and they were terminated by Biden. And Biden went by a standard that's the exact opposite.

So we don't know. But we do know that you had two planes at the same level—you had a air—a helicopter and a plane. That shouldn't have happened. And we'll see. We're going to look into that, and we're going to see.

But certainly, for an air traffic controller, we want the brightest, the smartest, the sharpest. We want somebody that's psychologically superior. And that's what we're going to have.

Yes.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Yes, please. Go ahead.

Russian Nationals Among Collision Victims

Q. Mr. President, you mentioned at the top of the briefing that there were several Russian nationals on the flight.

The President. Yes.

Q. Will the U.S. Government be willing to transfer—to facilitate the transfer of their remains, considering—

The President. Yes, we will.

Q. —the fact there is no direct air travel between the two countries?

The President. We've already been in contact with Russia. And the answer is, yes, we will facilitate. Yes.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Please go ahead.

Rwanda

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is getting worse. Even though President João Lourenço has been mediating the conflict between Rwanda and the Democrat Republic of the Congo because he wants to bring peace and stability, the situation is really bad right now. I want to hear from Mr. President if you have any plan in the future to bring peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President. Well, you're asking me a question about Rwanda, and it is a very serious problem, I agree, but I don't think it's appropriate right now to talk about it. But it is a very serious problem.

Collision Victims

Q. Mr. President, we don't even yet know the names of the 67 people who were killed, and you are blaming Democrats and DEI policies and air traffic control and, seemingly, the member of the U.S. military who was flying that Black Hawk helicopter. Don't you think you're getting ahead of the investigation right now?

The President. No, I don't think so at all. I don't think—were the names of the people, you mean the names of the people that are on the plane? You think that's going to make a difference? They are—they are—

Q. Does it comfort their families to hear you blaming DEI policies?

The President. —a group of people that have lost their lives. If you want a list of the names, we can give you that—we'll be giving that very soon. We're in coordination with American Airlines. We're in coordination very strongly, obviously, with the military.

But I think that's not a very smart question.

Q. But are you blaming—

The President. I'm surprised, coming from you.

Q. Are you blaming air traffic control or the military?

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

The President. Please. Please.

Collision Causes

Q. Thank you. Thank you, President Trump. Thank you for being here. Based on your analysis so far, do you have a sense of who was at fault—if it was the plane, the helicopter, air traffic control? And can you assure people that it is safe to fly in and out of DC?

The President. Well, I've given you the analysis, and the analysis was—was based on vision. You had a lot of people that saw what was happening. You had some people that knew what was happening. There were some warnings, but the warnings were given very, very late. Those warnings were given very late. It was almost as they were given, a few seconds later, there was a crash. It should have been brought up earlier.

But the people in the helicopter should have seen where they were going. I can't imagine people with 20/20 vision not seeing, you know, what's happening up there. Again, they shouldn't have been at the same height. If you're going in reverse directions or sideway directions, obviously you want to be at different heights.

I see it all the time when I'm flying. I—you have planes going in the opposite. They're always lower; we're higher, or they're—so, if somehow there's a screwup, there's not going to be a tragedy. It will be close, but you know, there's never going to be a tragedy if you're at a different elevation.

For whatever reason, they were at the same elevation. And, also, from the American Airlines standard, he's along the track that every plane is along. You say, "What was a helicopter doing in that track?" It's very sad.

But visually, somebody should have been able to see and taken that helicopter out of play. And they should have been at a different height.

All right.

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

Collision Victims

Q. Thank you, sir. You mentioned the Russians that were on board that plane. What other nationalities were on board that passenger—

The President. There were a couple of others. We're going to be announcing it in about an hour. We have some very specific information. We're calling the countries. We've spoken to most of them. But there were some other countries represented.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia

Q. Have you spoken to President Putin?

The President. I have not, no.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Q. Mr. President, on your Executive order.

The President. Not about this.

Q. Mr. President, a question, if I may——

The President's Memorandum on Keeping Americans Safe in Aviation

Q. On your Executive order. You've already issued an Executive order you say will restore air—aviation safety.

The President. Right.

Q. This crash happened after that. Was the Executive order successful? And what more needs to change to keep people safe?

The President. Well, you know, we issued it 3 days ago, and we were—we're in the process of making those changes. This is—this is something that should have been done a long time ago. Actually, my original order should have never been changed, and I think maybe you wouldn't have had this problem. Maybe.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Yes, please. Go ahead.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Air Traffic Control System

Q. Yes, thank you. We see, like, everyday life that very often the—those diversity hires cause, sometimes, issues, as you just mentioned. So what plan do you have? Are we going to see some fire—are you going to fire some of those diversity hires in the Federal Government? What's—what plan do you have?

The President. I would say the answer is yes, if we find that people aren't mentally competent. You see the language. The language is put out by them. And if you see that—I'm not going to bore you by reading it again, but these are not people that be—should be doing this particular job. They'd be very good for certain jobs, but not people that should be doing this particular job.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Air Traffic Control System

Q. Mr. President, you have today blamed the diversity element, but then told us that you weren't sure that the controllers made any mistake. You then said perhaps the helicopter pilots were the ones who——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——made the mistake. So——

The President. It's all under investigation.

Q. I understand that. That's why I'm trying to figure out how you can come to the conclusion right now that diversity had something to do with this crash.

The President. Because I have common sense. Okay? And unfortunately, a lot of people don't.

We want brilliant people doing this. This is a major chess game at the highest level, when you have 60 planes coming in during a short period of time and they're all coming in different directions and you're dealing with very high-level computer work and very complex computers.

And one of the other things I will tell you is that the systems that were built—I was going to rebuild the entire system, and then we had an election that didn't turn out the way it should have, but they didn't build the systems properly. They spent a lot of money renovating a system, spending much more money than they would have spent if they bought a new system for air traffic controllers, meaning the computerized systems. There are certain countries——

Q. So was the problem the computers systems——

The President. ——companies that do a very good job.

Q. ——or was it the control?

The President. They didn't use those companies. They used companies that should not have been doing it.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

No, I think—I think this—I think it's very important to understand that for some jobs—and not only this, but air traffic controllers, they have to be at the highest level of genius.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion/Federal Aviation Administration

Q. I want to—I want to ask you about the ice skaters in a moment, because the U.S. ice skating community was affected.

But first, if I can, the cited FAA text that you read is real, but the implication that this policy is new or that it stems from efforts that began under President Biden or the Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg is demonstrably false. It's been on the FAA's website——

The President. Who said that? You?

Q. No, I'm—it's on the website, the FAA's website. It was there in 2013.

The President. Oh. Oh, really?

Q. It was there for the entirety——

The President. Take a look. What I read——

Q. It was there for the entirety of your administration too.

The President. Nice and easy.

Q. So my question is: Why didn't you change the policy during your first administration?

The President. I did change it. I changed the Obama policy, and we had a very good policy. And then Biden came in, and he changed it. And then when I came in 2 days, 3 days ago, I signed a new order, bringing it to the highest level of intelligence. Okay.

Q. It was on the website——

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

The President. Please.

Q. Sir, respectfully, it was on the website for the entirety——

The President. Quiet. Quiet.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

Q. Welcome back to the—I'm sorry.

Collision Causes

Q. You mentioned vision was the—probably the problem that was at issue in this crash. There's been some reports that the—one of the pilots in the—in the helicopter may have been using night vision equipment. Is there any indication——

The President. I heard that. We don't know. You—we're going to know that pretty soon.

It may change your view plane if you do have the night vision. So it's very possible that could have happened.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

That would be—that would be maybe a reason why you wouldn't actually see as well as—on a clear night, you can see sometimes better without it.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

All right. A couple of more.

Q. Mr. President, is it helpful to have your Secretary of Transportation confirmed? And does this intensify your interest in getting other nominees confirmed quickly?

The President. [Inaudible] What?

The President's Cabinet Nominations/Senate Confirmation Process

Q. Is it helpful to have your Secretary of Transportation confirmed? And does this intensify your interest in getting other nominees confirmed quickly as well?

The President. Well, sure. We want fast confirmations. And the Democrats, as you know, are doing everything they can to delay them. They've taken too long.

We're struggling to get very good people that everybody knows are going to be confirmed, but we're struggling to get them out faster. We want them out faster.

It's a good question, actually. We've been pushing Sean—everyone knows Sean—for a long time. He got many, many Democrat votes. But they want to take as long as they can. They ask questions like some of the questions that Peter [Peter Alexander, NBC News] would ask that were totally irrelevant and not very good questions. But they want to just keep it going. They want to keep it going as long as possible.

I was very honored, actually, that you got so many Democrat votes. That was really good. That was really good.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Q. Mr. President, when are you planning to—when are you planning to meet with the families? And second question: Is it your impression that military training was done during that time?

The President. That what?

Collision Causes

Q. The training that the helicopter was involved in, is it—anything you can tell us about that? Is it—what it—

The President. You don't know. These are the things that will come up with the investigation. You don't know. But the helicopter obviously was in the wrong place at the wrong time, and a tragedy occurred.

Please.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Q. I've got a question about the—

The President. No, go ahead. Please.

Federal Aviation Administration

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You've been critical of the current regulations, and you've called for big reforms at FAA. I'm curious, sir, what—

The President. Well, I made the reforms, actually.

Q. What is your message—

The President. Three days ago, I made those reforms.

Collision Causes/Military Exercise

Q. Yes, sir. And what is your message, then, to the American public in the weeks and months ahead? Should they feel hesitant to fly?

And if you could clarify, perhaps, something that the Defense Secretary said when he said that this helicopter went on a continuity-of-Government mission.

The President. I don't know what that—what that refers to, but they were practicing. They were—they do that. They call it practicing, and they were. And that's something that should be done.

It's only continuity in the sense that we want to have very good people, and that has to be in continuity, and that's what they refer to.

But it was basically practice, and it was a practice that worked out very, very badly.

Okay?

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Safety of Air Travel/Air Traffic Control System

Q. Mr. President, yes, on his—on his question—the first question. Should people be hesitant to fly right now?

The President. No, not at all. I'm not hesitant to fly. I'm—this is something that—it's been many years that something like this has happened, and the collision is just something that we don't expect ever to happen again.

We are going to have the highest level people—we've already hired some of the people that you've already hired for that position long before we knew about this. I mean—"long before"—from the time I came in, we started going out and getting the best people, because I said, "It's not—it's not appropriate what they're doing." I think it's a tremendous mistake.

You know, they like to do things, and they like to take them too far, and this is sometimes what ends up happening.

Now, with that, I'm not blaming the controller. I'm saying there are things that you could question, like the height of the helicopter and the height of the plane being at the same level and going in opposite directions. It's not a positive.

But no, we're already hiring people.

No, safe—flying is very safe. We have the safest flying anywhere in the world, and we'll keep it that way.

Thank you all very much.

[Several reporters spoke at once.]

Thank you very much, everybody. Appreciate it.

Q. [Inaudible]—air traffic controllers?

Q. Were those people hired under DEI?

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:20 a.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Capt. Rebecca M. Lobach, USA, Staff Sgt. Ryan A. O'Hara, USA, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Andrew L. Eaves, USA, who died in the helicopter crash. A reporter referred to President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço of Angola.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : American Airlines aircraft collision with U.S. Army helicopter near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Duffy, Sean P.; Eaves, Andrew L.; Hegseth, Peter B.; Lobach, Rebecca M.; Obama, Barack; O'Hara, Ryan A.; Rocheleau, Christopher; Trump, Melania; Vance, James D. "J.D."

Subjects: Air traffic control system; Aviation safety, improvement efforts; Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, restriction efforts; Federal Aviation Administration; Federal Government recruitment and retention practices, improvement efforts; First responders, service and dedication; National Transportation Safety Board; Rwanda, political unrest and violence; Secretary of Defense; Secretary of Transportation; Senate confirmation process; U.S. Coast Guard; Vice President; Virginia, collision of military helicopter and passenger aircraft outside Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport.

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