

banning oil and gas development across more than half of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska.

Well, think about that. Of course, it is not the first time the President has moved to restrict conventional energy development, but it was notable for the scale of the restrictions and for the fact that his target was the National Petroleum Reserve.

I mean, think about this. The National Petroleum Reserve was established specifically for the purpose of providing the United States with energy resources, of leveraging our abundance of natural resources to promote our security. Now more than half—half—of that area will be closed to development.

The President's anti-conventional energy policies have consequences. By discouraging investment and curtailing the areas available for domestic production, the President is setting us up for a future in which we could have to rely on other countries for a significant part of our energy supply. And that is a problem, particularly when you consider the fact that that could mean relying on hostile countries. As European countries learned the hard way after Russia invaded Ukraine, relying on hostile nations for your energy supply is not a winning proposition. Plus, foreign production can be far less environmentally friendly than producing oil and gas here at home in the United States.

While the President fantasizes about eliminating the use of oil and natural gas and forcing all Americans into electric vehicles, the fact of the matter is that we are a long way away from being able to rely on alternative energy production to supply our Nation's energy needs.

We are going to need conventional energy for quite a while yet. And the best way to get that conventional energy is by developing the abundant domestic resources of the United States in an environmentally responsible way. We need an "all of the above" energy policy that embraces the full spectrum of available resources from alternative energy technologies to existing coal-fired and future natural gas-fired generation.

Between overloading our electric grid and discouraging future conventional energy production, the President's energy decisions and regulations are painting a bleak future for American consumers.

But there are things that we can do to check the President's irresponsible policies. Thanks to the efforts of Senator SULLIVAN and Senator RICKETTS, we will soon have a chance to vote on a Congressional Review Act measure to overturn the emissions rules that will force car and truck companies to electrify a huge portion of their sales lots and strain our electric grid even further.

I anticipate that Senate Republicans will also soon challenge last week's powerplant rules, and I hope—I really

hope—that there are at least a few Democrats who will join us to overturn these regulations.

Our grid simply cannot bear the burden of the President's new policies. And if Democrats care about more than winning votes from environmental radicals, they will see that and vote with us to overturn these regulations.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

FAA REAUTHORIZATION ACT OF 2024

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act that is before us shines as a beacon of safety, progress, and efficiency in the realm of aviation. It is not just any piece of legislation; it is a commitment to safeguarding lives, fostering innovation, and bolstering economic growth.

At its core, this bill ensures that our skies remain safe for all who traverse them. It sets stringent standards for aircraft safety, air traffic control, and airport operations, ensuring that every flight is conducted with the highest level of care and expertise.

Today, I rise to especially acknowledge the hard work that our air traffic controllers do day in and day out to keep our skies clear and safe for all.

Back home in Olathe, KS, we have an Air Route Traffic Control Center that is responsible for some 130,000 square miles of airspace.

Covering that much airspace is no small feat, and it takes a team of highly skilled and trained controllers to get the job done. In fact, I made a visit to that control center in Olathe, and what I found was perhaps the most constant bombardment of mentally challenging tasks of any job I have ever seen, more than anything I have seen in 8 hours or 12 hours in an operating room in 1 day, more than a day in an emergency room, more than any task I have seen, the mental challenge, the constant bombardment of different sequences, trying to make sure—not trying but ensuring that every flight lands safely. There is no room for error. There are no second chances. And it amazes me how, time after time, day after day, these stalwarts do their job with perfection.

And I have to admit, in years past, I have been disappointed that, despite billions being spent, allocated to the FAA each year, this Agency has continued to neglect hiring for air traffic controllers, not only in Kansas but across the Nation.

Again, based on my visit to our towers in Kansas, it is clear that our air traffic controllers need relief, and we need to hire more people to prevent burnout among those critical workers for the sake of preserving passenger safety.

Thankfully, we have a golden opportunity this week to make things right with this FAA reauthorization. The compromise package includes provisions to hire at maximum levels over the life of this bill and to adopt a new

staffing model to better project hiring needs in the future.

I want to especially salute Senator BRAUN's Air Traffic Controllers Hiring Act, as it is a commonsense, simple fix that over 30 Senators have supported. Including this bill in this reauthorization package was the right thing to do, and it is a bipartisan win that we can all celebrate together. I applaud the committee for including this important language and taking care of the folks who work around the clock to keep our deliveries on time and our passengers safe.

And, finally, I want to just take a moment to remember and applaud all of the Members of Congress, but, I think, even more importantly, their dedicated staff, who have worked on this FAA reauthorization legislation, along with all the dedicated aviation industry who strive to keep us safe and on time.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss the bipartisan, bicameral agreement reached for a long-term Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization. You would know, as a member of our committee, that we have worked hard to bring the FAA aviation community together to make certain that we do not end up with a result of one more extension after extension after extension, and that we can provide some certainty for the FAA in fulfilling its mission.

When I became the ranking member of the Aviation Subcommittee, I stated the importance of passing a long-term reauthorization and pledged to work with Senators DUCKWORTH, CRUZ, and CANTWELL, as well as my other colleagues on the Commerce Committee, to get a comprehensive agreement completed.

I want to thank the leaders of both the Senate Commerce Committee—Senators CANTWELL and CRUZ—and the House Transportation Committee—Congressman GRAVES and Congressman LARSEN—for their months of work to get us to this point. I also want to thank my counterpart on the Aviation Subcommittee, the chairman of that subcommittee, Senator DUCKWORTH of Illinois. She has been a pleasure to work with, with a commitment to aviation and experience to back up that desire to see success in this effort.

Multiyear reauthorization is vital for long-term planning and growth in the civil aviation industry, including the maintenance and modernization of aviation infrastructure and technology. Continuous short-term extensions are detrimental to the Agency, industry, and to the flying public.

This week and next week, Congress must come together to ensure our current extension of the Federal Aviation Administration, which is until May 10, will be our last—no more extensions.

Last October, the Senate recognized how critical the FAA is to the country

and evidenced that recognition by voting 98 to 0 to confirm Mike Whitaker as the FAA Administrator.

If the United States is to remain a leader in the aviation and aerospace domain, it is critical we provide the FAA with the resources and tools they require.

The aviation sector has seen close calls and near misses plague our Nation's air space, in addition to quality control concerns. Recent incidents indicate now—now more than ever—that our aviation system needs certainty and stability, and that is provided, in part, by a long-term authorization of Congress.

The original Senate legislation was drafted after eight committee and subcommittee hearings, and I am pleased that many of my priorities were included in this legislation.

Kansas will have an important role to play in advancing our aviation industry, including research and development and hypersonic flight and testing, as well as AAM and UAVs.

This legislation also includes my priorities to, one, bolster the aviation workforce, improve the FAA backlog, promote women in aviation, expand travel access for people with disabilities, attract air service to small communities, support staffing and training for air traffic controllers for the first time in decades, address new aircraft entering the air space, expand advanced air mobility, and safeguard essential air service programs.

I encourage my colleagues to, once again, find a collaborative way to move forward to address FAA reauthorization.

We manufacture lots of airplanes in the State of Kansas. We are the air capital of the world. More general aviation aircraft than anywhere in the world are manufactured there, as well as commercial aircraft. And I sometimes think that if I have any reputation as being an advocate for aviation, it is probably because we manufacture so many airplanes. And that certainly is true. But I also would highlight the importance of an airport and airplanes to small communities across Kansas, not just in the manufacturing that is centered around South Central Kansas. But every community and their airport are an essential way in which that community has a brighter future. Airports and aviation, including commercial air service to small airports, are hugely important to the wellbeing of States like ours.

The American people deserve the safest. In fact, that is probably the most important component of what we can do here. It is to ensure, as best we can, the safety of the traveling and flying public. There is no future of aviation and aerospace in Kansas or elsewhere if citizens of our country and around the globe are not feeling safe and secure to fly. The American people deserve nothing less than the safest and most efficient aviation system in the world.

Our bill provides critical safety enhancements, grows America's aviation workforce, invests in infrastructure at airports in urban and rural communities, sets clear priorities for advancing innovation in aviation solutions, improves the flying public's travel experience, and ensures a healthy general aviation sector for years to come.

Again, I thank my colleagues on the committee for working to accomplish this moment. I look forward to the vote that takes place a little later today, and I encourage my colleagues to work hard to see that we get this completed in the next few days.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I come to the floor today in support of the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. This has been a truly bipartisan, bicameral endeavor, and that is how it should be. It has taken longer than we had hoped, but the final product is worth it.

This bill will empower the FAA to aggressively address the aviation system safety crisis, make our aviation system more accessible for passengers with disabilities, provide historic investments that will enhance our Nation's capacity to recruit and train the next generation of aviation workers, and do so without lowering, weakening, or watering down the post-Colgan safety system, including pilot qualification standards.

There are many important provisions in this bill, but I want to highlight just a few today. First and foremost, this bill takes important steps to address critical safety challenges facing our aviation system. During the pandemic, retirements and buyouts drained critical experience from our aviation workforce, both in the Federal Agencies, like the FAA and the NTSB, as well as in the commercial aviation sector.

The post-COVID surge in demand for air travel put a huge strain on our system and stretched the remaining aviation workforce thin. Near misses and close calls became so frequent that the FAA was forced to convene a safety summit.

Despite this, the close calls keep happening over and over and over again. Just last week, a Swiss Air flight had to abort takeoff at JFK when four other planes were crossing the runway at the same time. The week before that, a Southwest jet crossed the runway at National Airport right as a JetBlue flight was starting its takeoff roll.

The need for Congress to act is urgent, and this bill takes important steps to address safety-critical challenges.

Importantly, our bill also preserves an important pillar of the post-Colgan safety system: the 1,500-hour rule for first officer flight training. As both a commercial and a private pilot, I know how critical real-world experience is in

the cockpit. It can mean the difference between life and death. As demand for air travel continues to grow, we will continue to need more pilots. But putting safety first demands that Congress always reject industry efforts to lower pilot qualification standards, and that is why I worked so hard to make sure that our bill left the 1,500-hour rule intact.

Air traffic controllers and surface detection is a key component of the FAA reauthorization bill also. Our legislation will also give a much needed boost to our air traffic controller workforce.

Coming out of the pandemic, our air traffic facilities are understaffed and our controllers are overworked. Last year, only 3 of 313 air traffic facilities nationwide had enough controllers to meet staffing targets, while controllers are working 60 hours a week to keep up.

This is dangerous. These are highly stressful, safety-critical jobs under the best of circumstances. Growing this workforce is a safety imperative, and this bill takes aggressive steps to do so. It will set a minimum hiring target equal to the maximum number of air traffic controllers our academy can accommodate. It will also require a more accurate staffing model going forward to ensure that there will be enough air traffic controllers to meet the growing demand and keep the flying public safe.

The bill will also expand deployment of surface detection technology to more airports to help prevent near misses or, worse, actual collisions.

Our bipartisan compromise also advances passenger safety by requiring the FAA to finally update aircraft evacuation standards to account for real-world conditions. Federal regulations require that, in the event of an emergency, passengers can evacuate an aircraft within 90 seconds. However, recent FAA in-person evacuation simulations used only able-bodied adults under the age of 60, in groups of just 60, on a plane with no carry-on baggage and nobody under the age of 18.

On a typical 737, you would see more than twice that number of passengers. I think it is safe to say that you would also probably see a couple of backpacks—maybe 100 backpacks—and probably some senior citizens, children, and passengers with disabilities too. All of these folks were left out of the latest FAA simulation.

So the fact is, we don't actually know if an aircraft can be evacuated in 90 seconds in real-world conditions, and that is what is so dangerous. The Miracle on the Hudson took more than twice that long to evacuate—3 minutes.

In January, when a Japan Airlines crew miraculously managed to successfully evacuate nearly 400 people from a burning Airbus A350, it took closer to 18 minutes from the point of impact and, overall, 5 minutes from the point of when the plane had stopped moving.

In 2016, it took more than 17 minutes to evacuate a 767 at O'Hare, after the

plane came to a stop, well short of the 90-second threshold.

Carry-on bags slowed down that evacuation; and since then, the NTSB has been recommending FAA take a closer look at this issue.

The bill before us today includes a provision Senator BALDWIN and I championed to require the FAA to finally do just that: along with mandating the Agency, actually consider other real-world conditions like the presence of children, seniors, and passengers with disabilities.

The FAA bill will also make much needed progress in transforming commercial air travel to be safer and more accessible for passengers with disabilities.

I was proud and honored to work with individuals and organizations in the disability community when drafting this portion of our legislation.

And while we still have a long way to go to ensure equal access for millions of people with disabilities when flying, if passed, our FAA Reauthorization Act would be one of the most significant leaps taken over the past decade towards improving the air travel experience for the disability community.

Our work builds on a yearslong effort by my colleague Senator BALDWIN. And I would like to thank her for her leadership on the Air Carrier Access Amendments Act, which has been a priority of the disability community for years.

And today, I am happy to say that several important provisions from that Baldwin bill are included in this reauthorization.

Today's bill also includes a new grant program to upgrade airports to make them more accessible for passengers with disabilities.

Two bipartisan, bicameral bills are also included: the Mobility Aids on Board Improve Lives and Empower All Act—or MOBILE Act—which I worked on with Senator THUNE and Representatives STEVE COHEN and PETE STAUBER, and the Prioritizing Accountability and Accessibility for Aviation Consumers Act, which I worked on with Senator FISCHER and Representatives STEVE COHEN and BRIAN FITZPATRICK.

I want to thank my colleagues across the aisle and in the House for working with me to show that even in this divisive political moment, we can—and we must—still legislate in a bipartisan fashion on issues that impact Americans throughout every inch of this country, in States that are both red and blue.

This bill will also help grow the next generation of pilots, aviation mechanics, and aviation manufacturing technical workers by expanding the FAA's Aviation Workforce Development Grant Program. This is critical to meet future demand, which is expected to grow tremendously. The FAA estimates the 696 million mainline enplanements we saw in 2023 will grow to more than 1.1 trillion enplanements by 2044.

I want to thank Senators MORAN, KLOBUCHAR, THUNE, KELLY, FISCHER, WARNOCK, and CAPITO for working with me to secure the highest level of investments forever for these grants.

I want to give a special thanks to Senator MORAN, who has been such a pleasure to work with, and also to my colleagues in the House and especially to our chairwoman of the committee, who has been so generous in working with me as the subcommittee chair.

While this initiative may be relatively new, in its short history, it has already proven incredibly popular with educational and training institutions, with the demands for training grants vastly outstripping supply.

Our bill will fix this imbalance by drastically strengthening the capacity and capabilities of our Nation's aviation education and training organizations, with the goal of successfully recruiting and preparing the next generation of American aviation workers.

Before yielding, I want to say a brief word about Boeing—a company with a proud heritage in American aviation. This bill does not fully address our many vexing issues that have come to light since a door plug blew out of an Alaska Airlines flight midair in January of this year.

Congress must look more closely at these issues and assess what additional legislation may be needed.

As Chair CANTWELL has indicated, we will be conducting vigorous oversight, but that will take time. And this bill contains urgently needed fixes to address immediate imminent safety risks. We must not delay passage of this FAA reauthorization while we continue our oversight of Boeing and all aviation manufacturers.

So let's pass this bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak for up to 15 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support for the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024. This bill, negotiated by Chair CANTWELL and myself, with the leadership of the House Transportation and Infrastructure and Science Committees, is a bicameral and a bipartisan accomplishment. It is the culmination of many months of work between us and our staffs and is reflective of the priorities of a great many Senators.

On the Republican side alone, more than 200 Member priorities were included. I am especially proud of the numerous provisions that make for a safer and more convenient travel experience for Texans and for consumers across the Nation and the provisions that will help grow Texas's thriving aerospace sector. It will make significant strides in aviation safety, the primary mission of the FAA—and something that I know that all of us care

deeply about. It will provide a clear path forward to integrate new advanced aviation technologies and will make it easier for fliers to get upfront information on ticket prices.

A flurry of near misses at our Nation's airports, multiple concerning maintenance reports of United Airlines' flights, and the alarming decompression event of Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 have together raised serious concerns with the safety of our airspace. Aviation safety has been, and will continue to be, one of the very top priorities of the Senate Commerce Committee. When the people of Texas board a flight, they expect their flight—and their families—to be safe.

As a result, I am proud to say that our bill includes numerous crucial safety provisions, such as requiring 25-hour cockpit voice recorders in all commercial aircraft. This safety upgrade will allow the National Transportation Safety Board and the FAA to have access to vital information needed during accident investigations. This became abundantly clear after the cockpit voice recorder in the Alaska Airlines flight was lost because of an outdated 2-hour requirement. That is unacceptable, and it should never happen again. With this bill, it will not happen again.

In response to recent runway surface incidents, this bill establishes a zero tolerance runway safety policy. It prioritizes projects that improve surface surveillance; it establishes a Runway Safety Council; and it requires a timeline and an action plan to actually get better runway and tarmac incursion technologies installed at airports that need them.

Air traffic controller shortages have plagued airports across the country—including in my home State of Texas—putting travel safety at risk. This legislation aims to relieve the strain on air traffic control by directing the FAA to hire the maximum number of air traffic controllers, hopefully aiding the many facilities that have been understaffed for far too long.

At a time when aircraft safety seems to be in the news every other day, our bipartisan bill makes important upgrades to safety reporting. Commercial aviation has improved in the last several decades, in part because the FAA and industry have tracked trends in safety to respond in a proactive manner to safety concerns, instead of waiting until after a fatal accident has occurred. Furthermore, this bill recognizes the important role that whistleblowers play and includes protections for those reporting safety concerns.

This bill also makes transformative investments in airports across our country by making updates to the formula used to disburse grants for airport infrastructure projects. As a result, all airports across the country will be able to rehab their runways or acquire critical safety technologies.

I am also pleased that the bill makes it easier to obtain permits for airport construction projects. This bill is good

for airports large and small across the Nation.

This bill does not ignore the fact that sometimes airlines screw up and leave consumers hanging. One provision parents in the Chamber should be really happy about is the requirement for airlines to ensure that families are able to sit together. This just makes sense and will help to make traveling with young children just a little bit easier.

I am also pleased that there is a requirement that customers who need customer service will now be guaranteed that they can talk to a human representative—an actual human being—24/7.

Finally, this bill makes important improvements for travelers with disabilities, including requiring training, for employees who handle wheelchairs, and it requires the DOT to actually respond to complaints submitted by aggrieved passengers.

I know there has been a lot of attention paid to the additional five round trip flights at DCA added by this bipartisan bill. Reagan National is the only airport in the country that Congress has decreed that a plane may travel no further than 1,250 miles from when landing or taking off from. It is absurd, and it is unfair to millions of fliers who are forced to pay higher prices because of this rule. It has been over a decade since Congress has expanded access to DCA, and the inclusion of five round trip flights is a modest proposal that will bring down consumer prices for fliers in the DC region and from western States. This modest increase will not result in negative impacts or delays, nor will it result in loss of flights for anyone who currently receives service.

I repeat: It will not result in loss of flights for any route that currently receives service, despite the threats and the fearmongering from the army of United Airlines' lobbyists who are actively working to protect their Dulles monopoly. By my count of United's threatened service cuts, these five round trip flights will lead United to cancel air service to more than half the States in the Union. Don't believe the propaganda.

And I have to say, it is not in the interest of any Senator to support a policy that reduces competition, enhances monopoly products for one airline—United Airlines—and drives up the prices not only for the residents of Virginia, DC, and Maryland, but for the residents of all 50 States who have come to our Nation's Capital.

In contrast, this modest addition of service would allow for further competition between the airlines that serve DCA. Competition is good for consumers, and it is good for lowering prices.

This change will also provide the ability for there to be a direct flight from San Antonio to DC Reagan, delivering a more convenient travel experience for members of the military traveling from Joint Base San Antonio to the Pentagon, to Arlington Cemetery,

to our Nation's Capital, and also for business travelers and tourists in San Antonio.

I also want to talk about the benefits this bill has for new aerospace technologies. Our bill helps the FAA both modernize and transform its operations and handling of new entrants, like drones and air taxis—a provision that will increase productivity and spur economic activity. Importantly, this reauthorization includes measures to eliminate inefficiencies plaguing the NextGen Office. This legislation also directs the FAA to complete the Beyond Visual Line of Sight rulemaking, which will expand drone delivery and other drone operations across the country and especially in my home State of Texas.

I am also proud of the reforms aimed at better integrating commercial space activities into the National Airspace System. Assisting launch providers in navigating complicated airspace will be a boost for Texas's thriving commercial space industry.

To carry out all of these ambitious goals, the FAA needs a workforce that has the technical expertise to conduct effective oversight of manufacturers and airlines, as well as technical experts who can help in the certification of these new and novel technologies. This was a major focus of our efforts. For example, in an effort to boost the aviation workforce and provide more opportunities for America's veterans, this legislation makes it easier for military servicemembers to transition to civil aviation careers.

This comprehensive and bipartisan bill bolsters the FAA at a time when the Agency needs support. The aviation system is more strained than ever. Millions of Americans travel every single day. Millions of Americans depend on this sector to earn their livelihood.

The U.S. aviation sector is the gold standard of safety, and I am proud of the improvements and reforms made in this bill. I look forward to working with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to advance this bill to final passage.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 20 minutes prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, my colleagues have already been out here today. It is a great day for aviation because we have a product before the U.S. Senate, and Members will be asked to vote to move forward on the consider-

ation of this important aviation safety legislation.

As my colleagues have already said, this is a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on the FAA reauthorization.

It is important to reauthorize both the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board for another 5 years. We are not only giving them direction and resources to improve safety, but we are asking them to keep up to date on the implementation of the latest technologies that help us do just that.

I want to thank my colleague Senator CRUZ, who was just on the Senate floor, for helping negotiate this through the Senate Commerce Committee.

I want to thank Chairman GRAVES and Ranking Member LARSEN from my State for their participation and dedication to producing this bicameral, bipartisan legislation.

I certainly want to thank Senators DUCKWORTH and MORAN, who chair the subcommittee in the aviation area, for their important contributions to this legislation.

I also want to thank President Biden, Secretary Buttigieg, and Administrator Whitaker for helping us on all of the input as we move forward on this legislation.

I certainly want to thank Senators SCHUMER, THUNE, DUCKWORTH, and SINEMA, who helped to negotiate key provisions of this as it relates to pilot safety and training.

I definitely, definitely, definitely, definitely want to thank the very hard work of our committee majority staff and the committee minority staff for working diligently on this important legislation.

I can't tell you how important it is at this point in time for us to show that we are paying attention to these issues. Over the last 12 months, several incidents—including a door plug blow-out and a string of close calls at airports—have made the public question where we are with aviation safety. We need to show them that we are asking for, implementing, and holding accountable the FAA to a gold standard for safety.

These incidents underscore why we need a strong reauthorization bill, why we need to implement safety improvements, why we need to invest in a safety workforce at the FAA, and why we need strong consumer laws on the books that give consumers a right to a refund. The FAA reauthorization bill does all those things. It provides the direction. It provides the resources. It helps us build that aviation workforce. It helps us implement safety technologies that will be part of the next-gen system and improve aviation and airport infrastructure nationwide.

Some of my colleagues may think, well, FAA, OK—it is an aviation bill, but what is behind this?

Aviation contributes to 5 percent of our GDP. That is \$1.9 trillion of economic activity and 11 million jobs. Getting this right is paramount.

I think some people look at what has happened during COVID and say: Everybody has workforce shortages. Everybody has problems with the workforce everywhere.

But when you have a workforce problem in aviation, it means you don't have the highest standards for safety. That is why we have to pass this legislation. Our bill gives the aviation workforce the tools and the platform they need. I am talking about machinists, about engineers, about mechanics, about pilots, about flight attendants, about baggage handlers, about maintenance workers—the people who really are the backbone of an aviation economy.

It is simple: This bipartisan bill puts safety first. It says we are authorizing over \$100 billion so that the FAA does meet that gold standard.

We also are including a robust reauthorization of the National Transportation Safety Board so this organization has the resources it needs to hire more investigators, conduct thorough investigations, and produce the highest level of critical analysis as to why—why—we have had safety accidents.

The NTSB needs to have the critical funding to carry out its important mission, like investigating Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 and the train derailment in East Palestine. These are important missions that help inform us what is wrong with our systems and how they should be improved. Unless we have those inspectors at NTSB—and we have lost some of them lately, and some have retired. We need to continue to have these most critical investigators.

This bill also funds key safety improvements of our system. It requires current and newly manufactured commercial aircraft to be equipped, as my colleagues have mentioned, with a 25-hour cockpit voice recorder. The standard today is just 2 hours. What unfortunately happened in the Alaska Air door plug issue is that, in those short 2 hours—when people were in the aftermath of the confusion, that 2 hours was overridden. Now we are asking the National Transportation Safety Board to investigate without the most critical information that would have told us exactly what was happening in the cockpit at that time—the voice recorder. This legislation is critical to have a mandate and never to have that overridden in this time period so we have enough time to investigate.

The NTSB also will strengthen its Board and its workforce. It investigates more than 2,600 accidents every year; however, it has had the same number of people as staff for decades. That is why those 33 more investigators would be better equipped and better able to understand emerging technologies.

I want to thank Senator KLOBUCHAR for her leadership. She, in her provision on runway traffic and landing safety technology, is helping us to reduce collisions or near misses at airports. This bill invests in deploying this tech-

nology that NTSB accurately assessed has been saving lives at various airports and says it needs to be deployed more across the entire country. These critical airport technologies will be required at all medium and large hub airports—to implement this within the next few years.

Building on the Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act—the bill that we passed in the aftermath of the two Boeing MAX crashes—this bill continues to make reforms in aircraft certification to ensure that the planes we fly meet the highest standards of the FAA.

To further the reform certification, we require the FAA to provide public notice and opportunity to comment on significant aviation product design changes. A lot of the confusion in the MAX incident, on the MCAS system, is people said they didn't know or didn't understand. This provision ensures transparency for proposed exemptions from current airworthiness standards. It puts the flying public—and, unfortunately, families have been impacted—more in the driver's seat of understanding what changes are being proposed to airplane certification.

It also requires recurrent training and stronger standards for manufacturer's representatives who act on behalf of the Federal Aviation Administration as unit members, to understand the manufacturing process. This includes strengthening the members' understanding of what are the international aviation standards from ICAO for safety management systems—which is the gold standard for safety—and procedures to report safety issues, a key recommendation from the Expert Review Panel's report.

To address safety concerns also, this legislation includes an analysis of what are called Service Difficulty Reports and regular updates to Congress. Service Difficulty Reports are information filed by pilots every day after a flight that tells somebody: This happened on our carrier. This incident happened.

We are strengthening the requirement for the FAA to analyze that information early and frequently and to give Congress updates on this—again, something requested by the families of the MAX air crash incident.

Additionally, we authorize \$66.7 billion to boost the FAA's staff and programs and resources to strengthen the oversight of the manufacturing process. This is critical in providing what are called safety inspectors by the FAA. These are people we hire and train at the FAA. They go to a community college and take a safety course, and they are required to understand what are the obligations of a manufacturer to implement the code that the FAA has. We need a more aggressive investment in these individuals from the FAA—their training, their skills, their ability to stay current on the latest and greatest technology.

To better support the FAA's oversight, the Agency is required to revise

and implement an updated aviation safety inspector model to reflect their increased oversight responsibilities. In 2021, the Department of Transportation inspector highlighted critical staffing shortages by facility at the FAA's Flight Standards and Certification Management District Offices.

Mr. President, I want to take a moment to give my condolences to the family of Ian Won. Ian Won was one of these people who helped understand the certification process at what is called the Seattle BASOO office. That is the office of the FAA that oversees certification.

We need people to stand up like Ian Won did, who said that the certification is only good when the FAA says it is good. Those are the kind of people we need in the system. We recently lost Ian to cancer but will remember his dedication to getting aviation right.

The Professional Aviation Safety Specialists, PASS, representing FAA safety employees, estimates that the FAA is currently experiencing a 20-percent shortage of safety inspectors. So implementing a revised model helps us better capture the inspector workload, what it takes to ensure the next generation of technology is fully understood, and to make sure that operators and manufacturers are complying with the law.

I also want to thank Senator SCHATZ for his helicopter tour safety provision. Many people know how many people travel to the State of Hawaii to travel on air tours in and around those beautiful islands, but that important safety responsibility has to be clear to those independent operators: that they are going to meet the highest standards when moving the public around.

Another safety provision that went in the bill by Senators BALDWIN, CAPITO, and WELCH, called the Global Aviation Maintenance Safety Improvement Act, will strengthen the FAA's oversight of foreign repair stations and create a more level playing field.

Unfortunately, as aircraft maintenance went overseas and the FAA didn't have enough inspectors, where did they not inspect the maintenance and repair of aircraft? In those overseas repair stations. But now we are taking away any incentive for someone to go do that overseas because the FAA will be there and will inspect and make sure that we are meeting the standard. So this will help us bring this back to the United States.

There are nearly 1,000 FAA-certified maintenance and repair stations operating outside the United States, and we have to make sure that they are properly regulated.

We are also, in this legislation, making sure that the FAA workforce is well trained and advised to help the FAA. It helps recruit skilled technical and expert staff to ensure that manufacturers don't take shortcuts. It helps the FAA do more direct hiring to quickly fill these positions.

And one of the most important aspects of the legislation is our most

pressing workforce problem, and that is the shortage of over 3,000 air traffic controllers. Everyone knows that these air traffic controllers are what guide us every day to the safety of our destinations. This bill recognizes that we have shortchanged that investment, with air traffic controllers sometimes working as many as 6 days a week. We need a workforce that is going to continue to tackle these challenges, and this bill makes the investment so that happens.

We have seen the FAA fall short of goals before in workforce training, but this staffing model and the FAA staffing committed to in this bill will help us fill that gap.

I want to thank Senators KLOBUCHAR, DUCKWORTH, WARNOCK, MORAN, THUNE, PETERS, and KELLY for their Aviation Workforce Development Grant Program in this legislation. It helps us grow pilots, mechanics, engineers, and technical workforce and streamline the job pathway for veterans who have real skill in the military and can more easily help us fill these aviation roles.

Our bill requires the GAO to also study airport worker standards, a step toward getting our baggage handlers, our ramp workers, and our aircraft cleaners the pay and benefits they deserve.

This bill also does something for the first time for consumers. It says that you deserve a refund after a 3-hour delay, even if you have a nonrefundable ticket. You also deserve a refund for an international flight if it has been delayed for 6 hours. And you can get that refund immediately by talking to the carrier or, if you decide you just don't even want to be on the delayed flight, you can get a refund.

I want to thank Senators MARKEY and VANCE for a mandate in the bill that says families get to sit together, and you can't charge us more. If the airlines break these rules, guess what happens. The DOT Assistant Secretary is authorized to issue penalties up to \$75,000 for fines and penalties to have a strong deterrent here.

I also want to thank Subcommittee Chair DUCKWORTH for her leadership in making sure airlines better accommodate passengers with disabilities. It is because of her unbelievable advocacy here that we are going to reduce the damage that is done to wheelchairs and to the passengers who have to make these flights for their own needs, and I certainly thank Senator DUCKWORTH, who is one of our national heroes and veterans, for her unbelievable pilot expertise in helping us.

Senators TESTER, FISCHER, and SULLIVAN are to be commended for their hard work to improve the Essential Air Service Program for small and rural communities that need important economic lifelines to have aviation in their community. We authorized a record \$1.7 billion for that program.

And, overall, airport infrastructure is getting a big boost too. I thank Senators PETERS, BALDWIN, and WARNOCK for championing making sure that air-

ports dispose of harmful chemicals that are harmful to all of us.

And I want to thank the Presiding Officer Senator HICKENLOOPER and Senators ROSEN, MORAN, THUNE, YOUNG, WARNER, and WICKER, who helped usher in the next generation of technologies for aviation—not just drones and air mobility aircraft but also the research and development necessary to see the electric and hydrogen-powered aircraft industry take off in the future. Companies like ZeroAvia in my State and Universal Hydrogen are leading the way with the next generation of strategies that will help us make these technologies a reality.

I just will say, too, that this legislation gives the FAA the direction to provide safe operating standards for advanced air mobility and safety for the 2028 Olympics, coming soon, in Los Angeles.

And I also thank Senators THUNE and WARNER for their legislation creating a pathway for drones to operate beyond the visual line of sight, which we have also included in this bill. And I acknowledge Senator ROSEN's hard work on the legislation for grants so that States are using the U.S.-manufactured drones to inspect, repair, and fix critical infrastructure.

So my colleagues can see that this legislation is full of safety improvements. It helps address a huge part of our U.S. economy. It helps make the aviation system today work better and guarantee that we are going to continue to focus on this for the future.

So I thank all my colleagues. I urge them to support the motion to move forward on this legislation that we will be taking shortly and get this to the House before the May 10 deadline. It is great bipartisan, bicameral work. But most importantly, it is safety improvements for our aviation system.

I yield the floor.

NOMINATION OF GEORGIA N. ALEXAKIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Georgia Alexakis to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

Born in Chicago, IL, Ms. Alexakis earned her A.B., magna cum laude, from Harvard College and her J.D., magna cum laude, from Northwestern Pritzker School of Law. Following law school, she clerked for Judge Marsha S. Berzon of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit and Judge Milton I. Shadur of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois.

Ms. Alexakis began her legal career in private practice handling breach of contract claims, tax disputes, and product liability matters. In 2013, she became an assistant U.S. attorney in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Illinois. In her first 4 years with the USAO, she served in the General Crimes and Narcotics and Money Laundering Sections, handling all aspects of criminal investigations and prosecution, discovery, and all trial stages. In 2019, she became the deputy chief of appeals, maintaining

her investigative and trial work while supervising other prosecutors on appellate briefs and oral argument preparations. She also served as the civil rights and hate crimes program coordinator during this time. She returned to private practice in 2022 as partner with Riley Safer Holmes & Cancila LLP. Later that year, she returned to the USAO as the chief of appeals in the Criminal Division.

Over the course of her legal career, Ms. Alexakis has tried 10 cases to verdict, 8 of which were in Federal court, and has argued approximately 30 appeals in the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. The American Bar Association unanimously rated Ms. Alexakis as "well qualified," and she has the strong support of myself and Senator DUCKWORTH.

Ms. Alexakis's courtroom experience, management credentials, and knowledge of the Northern District make her well-positioned to serve on the bench with distinction.

I was proud to recommend Ms. Alexakis to the White House, and I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting her nomination.

VOTE ON ALEXAKIS NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Alexakis nomination?

Ms. CANTWELL. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Arizona (Mr. KELLY) and the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) are necessarily absent.

The result was announced—yeas 54, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 156 Ex.]

YEAS—54

Baldwin	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rounds
Booker	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Kaine	Schumer
Butler	King	Shaheen
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Sinema
Cardin	Lujan	Smith
Carper	Manchin	Stabenow
Casey	Markey	Tester
Collins	Menendez	Tillis
Coons	Merkley	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Murkowski	Warner
Duckworth	Murphy	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Fetterman	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Graham	Peters	Wyden

NAYS—44

Barrasso	Daines	Marshall
Blackburn	Ernst	McConnell
Boozman	Fischer	Moran
Braun	Grassley	Mullin
Britt	Hagerty	Paul
Budd	Hawley	Ricketts
Capito	Hoeben	Risch
Cassidy	Hyde-Smith	Romney
Cornyn	Johnson	Rubio
Cotton	Kennedy	Schmitt
Cramer	Lankford	Scott (FL)
Crapo	Lee	Scott (SC)
Cruz	Lummis	