

**Testimony of Carol A. (“Annie”) Petsonk  
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of Transportation  
for Aviation and International Affairs  
Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
June 24, 2021**

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Wicker, Members of the Committee, I’m deeply honored to appear before you today as President Biden’s nominee for Assistant Secretary for Aviation and International Affairs at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

I’d like to thank my husband John Watts, who is with me here today. He is a wonderful public servant and a great dad to our fine son Nico, who is also here today. I’d like to thank my extended family who are watching from home. I also want to thank the government, industry, labor, academic, and non-governmental experts across the aviation sector and in international and trade law with whom I have had the pleasure of working over the years – I’ve so appreciated their expertise, perspectives, and time.

I grew up in the small town of Altoona, Pennsylvania, where our one-gate airport was our family’s gateway to the country – and the world. As a result, I have first-hand appreciation for this Committee’s work to connect communities across America’s heartland to the national and global economy. Since January, when I began managing the Office of Aviation and International Affairs, I have dedicated myself to faithfully administering those Congressionally-authorized programs that achieve this very mission – programs such as the Essential Air Service Program, the Small Community Air Service Development Program, and the hugely successful open-skies initiative. Together, these programs support a safe, vibrant, efficient, competitive, and resilient aviation industry.

Of course, the portfolio of the Office touches on all the Department’s international activities across the modal administrations. My experience in international affairs includes serving in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR); the U.S. Department of Justice; the United Nations Environment Programme (Nairobi); and the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF).

In my previous federal government service, I participated in the interagency development of international climate and environmental policy, and worked with colleagues in the Departments of Justice, State, Defense, and the U.S. Trade Representative litigating cases of strategic significance to the Executive Branch. I’ve also served as an expert observer member of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) committees, helping develop standards for implementing the landmark Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA).

Looking ahead, we must address major challenges as our Nation emerges from the pandemic. I am committed to working across the spectrum – with Members of Congress and their staff, consumers, labor organizations, industry, state and local stakeholders, and our colleagues across federal agencies - to find pathways to a stronger, more resilient transportation system. I believe that aviation – particularly sustainable aviation – can expand our base of great jobs. We can unleash innovation to create new opportunities for rural and historically disadvantaged

communities, safely enable the integration of drones into the airspace, and address climate change through measures such as those which incentivize greater use of sustainable aviation fuel.

The Commerce Committee, the Congress, and the American people have provided extraordinary assistance to the aviation industry in its hour of need. Our challenge now is to bring the economy safely out of the COVID crisis, help our Nation's transportation systems navigate the new normal, and deliver the infrastructure upgrades that are so essential to their success.

As more and more Americans get vaccinated, we're seeing significant increases in domestic travel, but our international partners are also eager to open travel with us. With safety as our north star, the Department must lead. I assure you that the dedicated team in the Office of Aviation and International Affairs is applying its expertise every day toward the goal of enabling Americans to reconnect safely – here at home and with the world. And we're focused on fairness – countering discriminatory actions and pressing other countries to provide a level flying field for U.S. carriers and their workers to compete.

I came into the Department inspired by my father, who was a brilliant electrical engineer and a pilot. He instilled in me a love and awe of flight and a deep desire to make things work for people. Both my parents were deeply public-service-oriented. They impressed this ethos on us over and over again with words that still ring true for me: "You owe a debt to society. You owe a debt to our country." Serving as Assistant Secretary of Transportation for Aviation and International Affairs would be the opportunity of a lifetime to repay that debt.

If I have the honor of being confirmed, I vow to work with this committee to strengthen the aviation and international transportation industries and their workforces, with a goal of improving results and opportunities for the American people. In closing, thank you again for your consideration and the opportunity to appear before you. I look forward to your questions.