

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation Hearing
December 17, 2025

Sen. Cantwell Q&A
[VIDEO]

Sen. Cantwell: Mr. Bedford, the chairman asked – the full committee asked you about the legislation we just passed on the Senate floor, and you said you didn't want to comment on it. Aren't you in support of the ROTOR Act that the Senate just passed?

FAA Administrator Bedford: Well, I'm new to the political realm, Ranking Member Cantwell, and I was advised that as legislation is pending, I shouldn't opine for the administration on whether the administration is in favor or not.

What I can tell you is both [as a] pilot and the former airline executive, I do support and I applaud the measures of the ROTOR Act. I was with you, or with Chairman Cruz on the dais when he announced the ROTOR Act.

I think the Secretary and I both have pledged our support with modifications that represent our ability to enhance our general aviation compliance, making sure that we're giving them the right tools and processes that we can get ADS-B like solutions.

Sen. Cantwell: I'm just trying to – if you stood next to Chairman Cruz and said you supported the bill, I just am a little confused about what you're saying now, because we did something great today, [and] took a big step, but at the same time, the same people who tried to stick this language into the NDAA I'm sure will try to thwart these efforts in the House of Representatives. So what I want to know is if the FAA administrator is fully behind the efforts to get this over the goal line and onto the President's desk.

Bedford: Well, again, I was with the chairman when he announced the ROTOR Act and talked about –

Sen. Cantwell: As I just said, as I just said. Okay, do you support requiring general aviation to be equipped with the [ADS-B] In in to improve situational awareness?

Bedford: So again, I believe as a pilot, greater situation[al awareness] in the cockpit is a good thing for all of us. Many pilots do it voluntarily. There are concerns, however, on confidentiality, how we treat the information and on the affordability of it. There are solutions today, I'm sure, aware where we can provide ADS-B In like solutions.

Just as a clarification, just so we're clear: when we talk about FAA [and] ADS-B In, that has a very clear definition in the regulation requiring it to be integrated into the flight deck. That's a very difficult concept for adoption.

Sen. Cantwell: I'm pretty sure you showed me something different in our office about how general aviation could use a different application.

Bedford: Absolutely.

So the point is that we do not want general aviation gutting the ROTOR Act or stopping the ROTOR Act. And we have lots of different problems to solve, and we definitely want the FAA and the administration's help on solving them.

So, I want to get to this ethics question, because I'm really bothered by the fact that you've missed the ethics deadline to divest from the company that we were all so concerned about. Why were we concerned about it? Because Republic [Airways] had been a key player in trying to get different rules before the FAA, and so you still have not divested from that. So, did you divest any of your shares in Republic [Airways] before December 1?

Bedford: Well, I appreciate the opportunity to clarify the record. So under my ethics agreement, I had anticipated being able to complete the merger of Republic [Airways] and Mesa Airlines and dispose of the shares on the open market.

Sen. Cantwell: This isn't about – you didn't take the job to make more money and decide when you had to divest. We set these rules up for everybody in the government. You're a very unique individual who hasn't complied. We didn't dig this up. The ethics people came to us and said “he didn't comply.” So if you're saying you're not complying because you want to make more money, it's like –

Bedford: No, actually, I think I have complied. I followed the rules. I told the career ethics officers what was going on. They told me I could apply for an extension. I applied for an extension. I heard nothing back from the career ethics officers to the contrary. I acted upon that in good faith. So yes, my intention was to continue to comply based on the advice I was getting from the career ethics officers.

Sen. Cantwell: I think they said that OGE denied this exemption because being “busy” at work was not a valid reason.

Bedford: Well, I think there was more to it than that, but the reality is, I relied on the career ethics advice that –

Sen. Cantwell: They're saying they denied the request.

Bedford: I applied for an extension. I was told that the agreement was tolled until we heard back from the –

Sen. Cantwell: Tolled? What was the word you just said?

Bedford: T-o-l-l-e-d, stayed, extended, that I was in compliance. My understanding I was in compliance throughout, but where we're at today, just to make sure we followed it to its conclusion, the merger has been completed. The shares have been terminated. We're waiting for the new shares to be reissued, at which point they will be divested as soon as reasonably –

Sen. Cantwell: I definitely don't think this is what OGE recommended. So I – this is actually kind of amazing. I- do want to ask you about the air traffic controller system and the fact that, in the case of the DCA accident, we've been hearing from air traffic controllers who were ringing the alarm bell.

They seem to be saying that we are hearing alarms and this needs to be fixed, but that didn't seem to be resonating with people who recognized this before the DCA crash. So, what are you going to do to fix this kind of input from the air traffic controllers into the system?

Bedford: Well, thank you for the question. I can tell you, even though I've only been on board with the FAA a little over five months, the agency took the accident extremely hard. That was a very, very difficult situation for the FAA to digest: the loss of a commercial aircraft, [and the] loss of 67 lives.

Having been on board now, I spent my first 100 days going out across the agency, from literally coast to coast, up to Quinhagak, Alaska, visiting all of our facilities, from Air Route [Traffic Control] Centers to TRACONS to towers.

I can tell you that the agency itself needs to reform. We need to change how we think about managing safety. At the FAA, we've proposed [the] creation of an integrated safety office that will take all of this

disparate data systems and safety folks from across the mosaic of the aviation ecosystem and consolidate them into one office that will have full responsibility for analyzing the data and making safety recommendations.

Sen. Cantwell: So you're going to say now somebody is going to listen to air traffic controllers on a regular basis, they'll have an input into a specific office, that information will be digested and presented both up and down the chain?

Bedford: I'm suggesting that the way the FAA has been designed is very siloed, and each one of those silos contains some small perspective on aviation safety that doesn't talk well across the different lines of business. So, by deconstructing safety out of the silos and putting it into a consolidated office, tasked specifically with looking at the entire aviation ecosystem, from certification to flight standards, to enforcement, to rulemaking, to obviously, the ATO, all of those things will now be integrated into one office,

Sen. Cantwell: Okay, but I'm asking something specific, because we learned this very well from the MAX situation, that you have to have line employees being able to communicate up and that information being digested by lots of managers above them, as opposed to having that shut down. And what we wanted to make sure happened in the Boeing case is that that information wasn't precluded from being shared with the FAA.

And the reason is because the FAA's job was oversight, implementation of rules and understanding problems before they became bigger problems. And I just want to mention, I mean, you said it was hard on the FAA. It's very hard on these families.

They're here, the Lilley family's here. Amy Hunter is here. Laura Augendre is here. It's hard on them. And what we have to do is get this right. So this is just a really basic question. You believe that the employees should be able to report into a system without intimidation by their manager, and that that information be digested like we heard 1500 alarm bells go off for a long period of time about the route.

Bedford: Well, every week when I address the team, I make sure that they know that they can reach me. They've got my emails. They know how to get a hold of me. So yes, to answer your question, of course, frontline employees should absolutely be able to—

Sen. Cantwell: Ok, well, usually you name that program, and then they're inputted, and then that is digested somewhere, and so that's the question I'm asking.

Bedford: If somebody sees something they should say something.

Sen. Cantwell: In a formalized system. We have all these reports that we get that basically is an IG who comes in later that says that information didn't get read or shared. And then what happens? Believe it or not, the public should know this, before the IG even gets to publish their report of their findings of bad problems, they send it to you, the agency, who then cleans it up before then it gets published.

So, the day the report gets published from the IG about all the problems, basically, the agency says, "Oh, we already fixed all that." And then it leaves us, the policymakers here, trying to figure out whether it really did get fixed or didn't get fixed.

So anyway, I do appreciate that you are at least willing to say that SMS needs to be system wide for the whole agency, I do appreciate that. Thank you.