

Rotor Operations Transparency and Oversight Reform (ROTOR) Act

Upgrading In-Flight Safety Technology and Fixing Helicopter Operations to Eliminate Risk

Senators Ted Cruz (R-TX), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN), Ted Budd (R-NC), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Roger Marshall (R-KS), Eric Schmitt (R-MO), Tim Sheehy (R-MT), Todd Young (R-IN)

The Problem

The midair collision between American Airlines Flight 5342 and an Army Black Hawk helicopter on January 29th was preventable. For decades, the airspace around the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) operated without an accident, but with thousands of close calls that should have resulted in preventive action.

The Black Hawk was likely operating in congested airspace without transmitting Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B) Out—a satellite beacon technology that can transmit location, altitude, and velocity to air traffic control and other nearby aircraft faster than radar or other transponders.

The airspace is only as safe as its least equipped aircraft, which is why military aircraft must not play by different rules.

The Solution: The ROTOR Act

The ROTOR Act improves aviation safety, addresses FAA knowledge and oversight of ADS-B, and directs the Army Inspector General (OIG) to reevaluate its aviation safety practices. The bill requires:

1. **All aircraft operators to equip with ADS-B In technology and transmit such information.** ADS-B In is a technology for aircraft to receive location signals from other nearby aircraft and ground technology, improving safety in the sky and on runways.
2. **Closes Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) loophole that permitted the Army Black Hawk to fly without broadcasting ADS-B Out.** The ROTOR Act allows the FAA to only grant exceptions for “sensitive government missions,” not training flights.
3. **Requires the FAA to review helicopter routes near airports.** The FAA would comprehensively evaluate the airspace at congested airports—where helicopters and airplanes are flying near each other—nationwide.
4. **Directs the Army OIG to initiate a safety coordination audit.** The Army Inspector General has declined to voluntarily review the Army’s aviation safety practices. The Inspector General would conduct an independent review of the Army’s approach to safety.
5. **Initiates FAA study on dynamic restricted area for helicopters near airports.** The FAA would review whether audio and visual signals could be deployed to reduce airspace confusion and avoid traffic conflicts.
6. **Repeals a Fiscal Year 2019 NDAA provision that exempted the Department of Defense from enacted ADS-B transmission requirements.**

Why This Matters

The tragic midair collision earlier this year exposed serious and systemic weaknesses in how civilian and military aircraft share and operate in congested airspace. While the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) investigation continues, initial findings show glaring failures in oversight and coordination that must be addressed now, not later. The ROTOR Act was drafted in direct response to the operational shortcomings that led to the midair collision. Deconflicting congested airspace and establishing better communication standards between civilian and military aircraft is not optional—it is essential. The ROTOR Act does exactly that, ensuring American skies remain the safest in the world.