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"Flying on Empty: How Shutdowns Threaten Air Safety, Travel, and the Economy"

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Senator Moran, Senator Duckworth, and members of the Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation, on behalf of the General Aviation Manufacturers Association (GAMA), thank you for inviting me to testify on the impact of the recent government shutdown on the aviation sector. We appreciate the opportunity to highlight how the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and partner agencies have fulfilled essential services and worked with manufacturers, maintenance, and training providers since October 1st to keep the FAA certification process and other aspects of aviation safety functioning during difficult times as well as outlining some impacts on product development, innovation, and U.S. aviation global leadership. Finally, I want to highlight some steps where industry and government can work together to advance aviation safety, its economic contributions, and competitiveness.

By way of background, GAMA is an international trade association representing more than 140 companies which comprise most of the world's leading manufacturers of general aviation airplanes, rotorcraft, engines, avionics, advanced air mobility powered lift aircraft, components, and related technologies. GAMA members are also providers of maintenance and repair services, fixed-based operations, pilot and maintenance training, and aircraft management companies. In the U.S., general aviation supports $339 billion in total economic output annually and 1.3 million total jobs[1], with GAMA companies having facilities in 49 states. General aviation contributes to the economies of all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

First and foremost, I want to acknowledge the dedication and sacrifice of federal employees, including those at the FAA, partner agencies, and contractors, who are responsible for the safety, security, and economic health of the aviation sector. They have missed multiple paychecks,

[1] Contribution of General Aviation to the U.S. Economy, PwC, February 2025

creating economic and emotional distress for employees and their families, including job status concerns in some cases. As a former FAA employee, I have seen how difficult shutdowns are for the agency and its workforce and know firsthand they are not easily recovered from. While the controller workforce has rightly been the focus of attention, these pay and job issues have challenged thousands of FAA employees, including those dealing with aviation safety issues for certification, manufacturing, operations, maintenance, and training.

On a personal and professional level, myself, my colleagues, and the companies that we are privileged to represent deeply value these public sector servants. Retaining them and providing support is critical to ensure our industry and nation can recover from this setback. The U.S. aerospace sector is an extremely complex and interdependent system that relies on fully functioning government and industry partners to thrive.

Managing the 2025 Shutdown for Aviation Manufacturing, Maintenance, and Training Organizations

The shutdown limited FAA to conducting essential activities which are those "necessary to protect life and property" or required by law. For GAMA member companies, this was confined to safety inspections and oversight, continued operational safety and addressing unsafe conditions through Airworthiness Directives. A significant number of the FAA workforce in the Aviation Safety Aircraft Certification and Flight Standards offices were put on furlough. FAA leadership exercised discretion, within the limits of the law, to identify available options to enable safety and productivity. Consistently, the agency, its leadership, and workforce engaged with our member companies to ensure we were kept informed and addressed issues as they arose. This includes working with manufacturers and maintenance providers proactively to conduct safety oversight and authorizations to enable ongoing aircraft certification, production, and airworthiness activities. The ability for manufacturers to continue product development certification and manufacturing is largely attributed to the abilities of companies to utilize existing FAA-approved delegation and related authorities. However, the ability to maintain support for programs was hampered because FAA was unable to fully engage in continued designee appointment and oversight activities. Since the ability to travel was severely restricted,

the FAA was able to leverage alternate methods for conducting oversight and witnessing key activities, including the use of locally available resources and digital capabilities like video.

The FAA recognized that delays in oversight and design approval certification activities increase systemic risk. In addition, this delays U.S. development of product improvements and safety-enhancing technologies from entering the National Airspace System (NAS). As the shutdown continued to extend into weeks, FAA started to recall portions of the workforce to conduct additional safety oversight, authorizations, and certification activities which enabled manufacturers, repair stations, and training organizations to safely continue ongoing operations.

Partner agencies are also to be commended for their management during the six-week shutdown. The U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), supported by FAA engineers, pilots, and inspectors as needed, continued to launch and conduct investigations of accidents that occurred during the past month-and-a-half. This is a different approach from the 2018-2019 shutdown where NTSB only conducted limited work during the funding lapse which caused a significant backlog that the agency spent years recovering from with implications on volume and timeliness to complete reports.

Along with its critical role in security screening, the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has also supported the general aviation sector. The agency's Enrollment Services and Vetting Programs (ESVP) team conducted vetting of our pilots and training centers to support the industry during the shutdown. We want to say thank you to the TSA staff for their commitment to securing the transportation sector during these difficult times.

Near and Long- Term Impacts of the 2025 Government Shutdown

Despite this tremendous work and sacrifice by the FAA workforce, the shutdown significantly impacted important activities of the agency and U.S. manufacturers and aviation businesses. Many of the areas facing disruption were areas this Committee, and Congress as a whole, prioritized during the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024 (P.L. 116-83) including international leadership; FAA workforce growth and development; supporting U.S. technology and aviation; important aviation safety, security, and technology rulemakings; and modernization of the

certification processes. The FAA is now in a deeper hole for addressing these and meeting congressional direction and intent.

The most significant impact of the 2025 government shutdown on manufacturers is that no new certification projects were allowed to start which impacted the pace of U.S. aerospace innovation and completely halted new business activities. During the shutdown, the FAA could not accept or facilitate work on any new applications for design and production approvals. GAMA is privileged to represent companies that continuously modernize and improve the existing aircraft fleet through safety retrofits, avionics upgrades, improved systems reliability fixes, and deployment of NTSB recommended safety enhancements. In addition, these companies are investing in the development of new future aircraft and technologies that could transform aviation. But the government shutdown results in delays to these projects. This significant backlog includes supplemental type certificates and modifications to existing aircraft. For example, there are many repair stations located in nearly every state which install supplemental type certificates (STCs) for new safety enhancing and other modern capabilities in aircraft. It is very common for customers to have specific requests for modification to their aircraft such as a different model of equipment, type of seat, or interior configuration which requires a change to the previously approved STC. The FAA will be unable to act upon all these new applications immediately and these will likely impact certification activities for months to come.

FAA Aviation Safety workforce in aircraft certification and flight standards recruiting and skills enhancement and training initiatives were also severely impacted by the shutdown. As an organization that has endured leadership changes and retirements, the opportunity to grow and maintain technical expertise is critical and something that the 2024 FAA Reauthorization strongly encouraged. A significant concern involves the approximately 600 engineers, pilots, inspectors, and technical specialists that AVS was actively hiring when the shutdown began. These candidates were left in limbo and may now decide not to pursue federal employment. It takes 6-12 months to train a new certification engineer before they can just start to be productive. It is a multi-year process to qualify a new flight test pilot. This highlights the compounding effect of lost time and lost applicants. It isn't a six-week disruption, it's a multi-year set back, particularly for highly technical and unique skills such as structural loads, software, hybrid propulsion, system safety, and flight test pilots.

For these highly technical safety positions, direct-hire authority is one of the FAA's most effective tools for attracting, rebuilding and sustaining the specialized technical talent pipeline and ensuring the agency can meet its safety mission, support U.S. innovation, and uphold global aviation leadership. The FAA competes directly with manufacturers, technical firms, and global aerospace companies for the same highly skilled professionals, and industry hires in days while the traditional federal hiring process can take months. Direct-hire authority allows the FAA to recruit in weeks instead of losing top candidates to faster-moving employers. Several of these direct-hire authorities for engineers, pilots, and inspectors expire at the end of this year so we recommend that this be extended or permanently implemented for these highly specialized safety positions particularly given the shutdown.

Additionally, the FAA was prevented from engaging in key aviation safety and cooperation leadership discussions both domestically and internationally. During the months of October and November, the FAA had to cancel InfoShare, the premier annual aviation safety data exchange conference, and was unable to fully participate in events at the International Civil Aviation Organization, Annual Certification Management Meetings with leading states of design, to advance aviation safety bilateral cooperation.

This inactivity reduces U.S. global leadership in aviation and misses opportunities to advance standards and implementation procedures which facilitate efficient global acceptance of new aviation products and technologies such as commercial aircraft, Advanced Air Mobility powered-lift aircraft, and electric and hybrid propulsion systems. Typically, strong engagement in these meetings provides opportunities to engage and establish global standards, promote safety, and facilitate industry growth. Because of the government shutdown, FAA participation was cancelled or limited in nature, diminishing the agency's leadership and standing with their peers. Competing authorities continue moving forward while FAA is frozen, making the U.S. appear unreliable as a certifying authority and, because of U.S. absence at international aviation standards meetings, provide opportunity for foreign States of Design to shape global rules.

Limitations on agency travel during the government shutdown have also had strong impacts. There are certain certification testing activities which require FAA involvement with technical experts that are not available at local offices. For example, FAA flight testing is a critical activity

that requires specific pilot expertise which is very limited and tightly scheduled but needed across all aircraft manufacturers. The inability to conduct all needed safety functions such as flight testing directly impacts critical FAA resources and has created a backlog of activities that will continue to delay manufacturer certification activities for several months. This adds uncertainty and a lack of predictability in government and industry planning and coordination and undermines the agency's ability to meet commitments that slow down critical agency oversight and the work of U.S. manufacturers.

FAA workforce availability is essential to effectively and efficiently work through the backlog of activities that build up during the shutdown and restoring U.S. aviation business activities and competitiveness in product development, innovation, manufacturing, and global exports. Given the amount of change and uncertainty for the federal workforce this year, further exacerbated by the six weeks of shutdown, one of the greatest challenges and significant risk to recovery is the backlog of the individual personal time off (PTO) "use-or-lose" annual leave benefit which must be used by January 10, 2026, or be forfeited. Consistent with what was implemented following the 2018-2019 shutdown, we recommend that the Administration extend the ability for federal employees to use their earned PTO annual leave benefit at least to the end of CY2026 so that the FAA does not face a significant workforce shortage in November and December when they are needed most for starting to make up for lost ground.

Another area where there are impacts is the FAA's regulatory and rulemaking efforts. A contributing factor in delaying U.S. manufacturer product development activities, preventing safety and innovation from moving forward and benefitting the aviation system, has been significant delays in the FAA's promulgation of rulemaking, policies, and guidance. This has caused a large backlog of regulations, technical standards, policy memos, orders, and advisory circulars which enable new products and technologies and efficient certification processes.

Delays in promulgating modernization updates to airworthiness standards impede industry's ability to implement safety improvements and enhancements. This also causes significant regulatory and cost burdens on both industry and FAA by requiring individual redundant and inefficient processes for issue papers, special condition and exemption rulemakings, increasing risk and unpredictability when these regulatory materials are not adopted in a final format. Unfortunately, FAA regulatory and rulemaking processes for new standards and technology

during the shutdown ceased, further compounding a situation that was already challenging. The result is that efforts to improve coordination, and yield support for safety, innovation, and international leadership for the entire aviation sector were effectively put on hold. This includes key congressionally directed rulemaking efforts in the 2024 FAA Reauthorization Act. For example, work halted on current priority rulemakings such as disclosure of safety-critical information, cyber security, 5G radar altimeter safety, and transport airplane and propulsion certification modernization, as well as regulatory standards and materials to enable new technologies such as unmanned aircraft system detect and avoid.

Along with their other significant oversight activities, the FAA Flight Standards team has continued to provide oversight of our member company pilot and maintenance training centers, recognizing these industry operational capabilities as "essential" to support aviation safety. However, all new activities such as the qualification of new simulator equipment, course approvals, and new examiner designees were put on hold. The FAA resources to perform this work are already scarce and, based on the experience of the 2018-2019 shutdown, it may take six to nine months to recover in this area, constraining the capacity to maintain and train the pilot workforce.

Preventing Future Shutdowns

The extension of federal funding until January 30, 2026, means that it is imperative for Congress to act swiftly in passing a Fiscal Year 26 (FY26) Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) Appropriations bill. While these proposed funding levels need to be reconciled and a final bill needs to be considered and passed, this legislation will make key investments in agency workforce staffing and training, modernization efforts, and aviation safety. We strongly urge policymakers to work to prioritize and complete a FY26 THUD Bill. Missing the opportunity to do so will only compound the challenges that the agency was already facing and have now mounted because of the government shutdown.

In the past, Congress has acted to address problems that have occurred at the FAA due to government shutdowns. For example, during a government shutdown in 2013 the FAA Registry Office was subject to closure, halting the registration and delivery of aircraft impacting almost $2

billion in transactions[2]. The U.S. Congress addressed this in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization (P.L 115-254) and deemed the office essential. Even with this legislation, the FAA realized that additional action needed to be taken to realize the full purpose of this legislation and has acted during this shutdown to enable the issuance of airworthiness certifications.

For GAMA, and other industry leaders, it is critical that Congress take action to prevent future shutdowns from hampering the critical work of the FAA. Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS) has introduced S. 1045, the Aviation Funding Stability Act of 2025, and similar legislation has been introduced by Congressmen Steve Cohen (D-TN), Andre Carson (D-IN) and Aaron Bean (R-FL) in the House. This legislation would enable the FAA to draw from the Airport and Airways Trust Fund, funded by users of the aviation system, to preserve the air traffic and safety operations of the agency. GAMA strongly supports this legislation and is open to working with all interested members on the best way to enact legislation that would protect the FAA as an entity from future shutdowns.

The 2025 Government Shutdown and Air Traffic Modernization Efforts

As we have seen, the 2025 government shutdown has led to air traffic challenges across the U.S. We owe a great deal of gratitude to FAA management and the controller and technician workforce in managing these challenges. Despite those efforts, commercial, cargo, business, and general aviation operations have all been reduced during the shutdown to work to maintain aviation safety and address increased risk.

In the wake of the accident at DCA, the aviation industry came together to form the Modern Skies Coalition, and GAMA is a proud Steering Committee member along with A4A and NATCA and many others. This broad group of industry stakeholders, including airlines, operators, manufacturers, labor unions, and airports have identified the following priorities:

- Robust funding for FAA to make critical ATC technology and infrastructure investment and to strengthen controller and technician staffing and training.

[2] GAMA Press Release - October 7, 2013

- Direction to FAA to achieve prudent divestment from legacy NAS elements and utilize existing procurement authority to facilitate the effective deployment of state-of-the-art technology.
- Realignment and modernization of ATC facilities to improve operational efficiencies and leverage technological developments.
- Exempting the FAA from government shutdowns to ensure more predictable funding and support for continued safety and air traffic control personnel hiring and training, and other critical FAA personnel.
- Continuation of general fund support for FAA operations and consideration of additional flexibility within the Airport and Airways Trust Fund to manage long-term facility and technology upgrades.

Thanks to this Committee, Congress took a big step forward in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (P.L. 119-21), in terms of progress on air traffic control investment. The law provided $12.5 billion as a downpayment for ATC modernization efforts focused on the replacement of FAA radar and information display systems, construction of a new air traffic control center and realignment of existing facilities, recapitalization of terminal radar approach control facilities, and other safety and infrastructure investments.

While this is an important step, we know much work remains to modernize the U.S. ATC system. Notably, Transportation Secretary Duffy has repeatedly stated the cost of this effort is likely to be at least $31.5 billion. Subsequent investment is likely to be focused on areas like a common automation platform and investment in air traffic towers and facilities. The shutdown was counterproductive to these modernization efforts and the addressing of controller staffing issues. Like the aviation safety and regulatory issues, we must all work to regain momentum on these Modern Skies priorities. It is a national imperative.

Conclusion

GAMA appreciates the opportunity to share these perspectives with the members of the Senate Aviation, Space, and Innovation Subcommittee. The aviation sector needs policymakers to work in a bicameral and bipartisan fashion to provide stability to the agency and make critical

investments to advance safety and efficiency improvements for the industry. We now have more to overcome but the U.S. is on the cusp of a new dawn in aviation technology and innovation that will be considered one day in line with other achievements like the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk in 1903, and the moon landing in 1969.

It is our hope that these policy suggestions inform you and your colleagues on ways to improve the strength and operation of the FAA given its criticality in supporting aviation safety, air service to all U.S. communities, and economic growth and competitiveness. Thank you and we look forward to working with this Subcommittee on these critical initiatives.