

Testimony of
Michael Peter Huerta
Nominee for Deputy Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration,
Department of Transportation
before the
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
United States Senate
January 26, 2010

Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Hutchison, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am honored that President Obama has nominated me for the position of Deputy Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration. If confirmed, I look forward to the opportunity to work with Secretary LaHood, Administrator Babbitt, the Administration and of course you in Congress to serve our country in this capacity.

I would also like to introduce the members of my family who are present today: First, my wife Ann Sowder, who is my best friend and life partner. On more than one occasion she has encouraged and supported my desire to follow for my heart and passion to try something new and challenging. She shares my belief that public service is truly a noble calling and I would like to thank her for all that she has done not only for me but for countless others. I would also like to introduce our son Matthew. He has inherited his father's interest in transportation and aviation and was once observed – at age six --schooling a couple of off-duty pilots on the fine distinctions between various aircraft types.

The Federal Aviation Administration has a huge responsibility and faces significant challenges.

As you well know, the FAA's mission is to provide the safest, most efficient aerospace system in the world. It carries out its responsibilities both as a regulator and as an operator.

Crucial to the success of the FAA is its ability to work in partnership with its diverse stakeholders including the private sector air carriers and the general aviation community.

The FAA also relies on sophisticated technology. Its systems must meet exceptionally high standards of safety, security and reliability.

And, of course, the agency is a large and complex organization and it has an ambitious agenda for transitioning to a next generation air traffic control system, while continuing to operate on a daily basis the largest air traffic system in the world.

In my career, I have been privileged to have had wonderful professional opportunities both in the public and private sector. I held senior policy positions at the U.S. DOT under President Clinton, which gave me valuable insight into how federal agencies work and, in particular, the important role played by the FAA.

More recently, I led a large transportation technology services company. I had responsibility for the operations of a large, global organization, managing a diverse and technical workforce and ensuring that we met our financial targets. Our customers were for the most part state and local government agencies and we provided critical systems that were central to them successfully executing their missions. I came to develop a great appreciation for the benefits to be gained by partnerships between different interests in government and the private sector.

The years I spent with the Salt Lake Olympic Committee taught me about how an immovable deadline can be extremely powerful in motivating and focusing a team toward a common objective. We had to be focused but flexible, and ready to adapt to the unexpected.

My skills and experience will be helpful as I look at what might be ahead at the FAA.

I am excited about the prospect, if confirmed, of playing a major role in the FAA's deployment of NextGen, the new air traffic control system. NextGen is in fact a system of systems, which must all work together in a coordinated and fashion to improve the safety and efficiency of our nation's aviation system. Its successful deployment has been identified both by Secretary LaHood and Administrator Babbitt as a critical objective for their tenure. I am committed to do everything I can to help ensure that objective is met.

I am also aware the series of short-term extensions in FAA authorizations have created a degree of uncertainty within the FAA and the aviation community at large.

It is important that FAA Reauthorization gets done. There are important safety programs that need to be reauthorized. If confirmed I look forward to working with Congress and aviation stakeholders throughout the legislative process.

I hope that my background and experience will assist the FAA in meeting the challenges it faces in the coming years. I am honored to have been nominated by President Obama. I look forward to working in partnership with you in ensuring that our nation's aviation system leads the world in safety, efficiency and innovation.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I am happy to respond to any questions that you might have.