

**Ranking Member Maria Cantwell Q&A**  
**“Preventing Future Collisions: Evaluation of FAA Safety Measures from the DCA Crash”**  
**Subcommittee on Aviation, Space, and Innovation**  
**May 19, 2026**  
[\[VIDEO\]](#)

**Sen. Cantwell:** Yeah, thank you to you, Chairman Moran, and to Senator Duckworth for both holding this important hearing and for your due diligence on all these issues. This needs to have a lot of attention, and I appreciate Administrator Bedford for being here today. I think my colleague, Senator Duckworth, has probably asked some questions already about compliance with all the recommendations of the NTSB findings after the crash in DCA, but could I get for the record from you each...of the recommendations by the NTSB, and whether you plan to implement them? I think there's 52 so each one just say yes, and we plan to implement it, or no, we don't plan to implement it, or yes, it'll take 10 years, whatever. Just give us a highlight, not right now, but for the record, if I could get that from you, that would be great.

**Administrator Bedford:** So you have a sheet, which I've provided, which gives you a summary of the 35 FAA-specific recommendations and where they are in their implementation.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Great, thank you so much. We'll look at that, and we'll look at that in detail. Now, obviously, one of the issues is how we fix this system, and also the conversations that people have had about the safety that NTSB brought up after the accident, which is the full implementation use of Time-Based Flow Management (TBFM) systems at Potomac TRACON and the air [traffic] facilities [within its airspace]. This tool allows air traffic controllers to sequence the aircraft [and] more efficiently distribute airport...capacity, but I'm concerned that a whistleblower at Potomac TRACON informed my office that the FAA leadership instructed controllers at the facilities to use TBF[M] at all times, even when they judge it to be unsafe due to bad weather or complex operations. In this case, when the individual exercised their professional judgment to state that “these are unsafe conditions to use this tool,” they were removed from their duties and faced retaliation for raising these safety concerns.

So, what does it say about our Air Traffic Organization and safety culture when workers are being retaliated [against] for raising legitimate safety concerns and so -- just so everybody gets and understands this a little clearer -- this is about when you say you can have so many flights per hour, but then somebody stacks all the flights 10 minutes before the hour or 10 minutes after the hour, so that is not a good idea, because over, you know, 60 minutes, you might have to be able to have pretty good flow, but if you're now saying to people, well, we'll all let you because you like the system to be, you know, around the time that you want to maximize takeoff and landings to promote it as an airline, you allow for a different structure, then that obviously becomes problematic, so you're not stretching all those flights over 60 minutes, you're bundling them at 10 before and 10 after the hour. So, should the [FAA] management be instructing air traffic controller personnel that TBFM must be available for use at all times, or only used at, you know, the, you know, when the [appropriate] conditions are being met?

**Bedford:** Well, thank you for that question. I couldn't agree with you more. That the way we manage traffic today is chaotic, and we can do better. SMART system -- Strategic Management

of Airspace Routing Technologies -- would solve those issues, and I'm pleased to report that we're on a pathway to implementation of SMART before the end of the year, which essentially addresses these issues. You have a graphic on page two of your handout that speaks to precisely what you just described. I can look at it on an hourly basis, and everything looks like it's going to be very easy to manage, but when I look at it in the 15 minute, I can see 12 peak periods where airlines are stacking those flights, we can do better. We need to, we need to manage that at the FAA, rather than rely on commercial airlines to simply schedule however they want. We did the same thing in Chicago O'Hare.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, so great. Without...I love new technology, it can always help, but what I want from you is a commitment, that you will correct this and not discipline employees who bring this up as a safety concern. I don't want to wait for the technology to be implemented, because I don't want the situation to happen again. So, I just am looking for your commitment that you will have greater oversight over the Air Traffic Organizations to make sure that there are not risks that the American public are taking right now, given this situation without the next implementation of technology.

**Bedford:** I'm very accessible to the front-line workforce. I haven't heard of this particular whistleblower issue but I would encourage them, if they're not getting support from the management team, I'd like to hear about it.

**Sen. Cantwell:** About the idea, so now are we saying we can't fix this problem right now, or we can?

**Bedford:** Senator, we have culture issues at the FAA, and I am absolutely laser focused on changing them in a positive way.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, so you are for slowing down the flights if, in fact, they are too bunched at the top or right after the top of the hour.

**Bedford:** Absolutely.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you. Let's go to what we're doing on the ROTOR Act. I see various family members here. Thank you, guys, for coming again. Obviously, we have a bill in the House and the Senate, and we need to get them over the goal lines. The military section of the ALERT Act would give the military sole discretion over decisions about ADS-B In and Out and equipment use, even though the FAA's ADS-B Out regulations say the FAA can require the operators have and use certain equipment to fly safely in designated airspace. Do you have concerns that this could undermine the FAA's authority to regulate and ensure that safety in the national airspace?

**Bedford:** Well, first of all, we've provided significant technical assistance to both chambers for ALERT and for ROTOR, so I would strongly encourage you to look into the technical assistance for how the FAA feels about both pieces of legislation, but we need to have better coordination if, in fact, we're going to operate with two levels of equipment, then we have to have much better coordination in the air space. I hope that isn't where we end up...

**Sen. Cantwell:** But you're not suggesting we reestablish these routes right now, are you?

**Bedford:** Military route? Look, no, we have changed the whole management of airspace around Class B, C and terminal radar air space, so we no longer allow visual separation as a separation tool between mixed flights within the airport environment.

**Sen. Cantwell:** But what about the route? What about the route itself? Are you going to try to reestablish this route with, like, very little separation between commercial and military in the D.C. area?

**Bedford:** What I'm telling you is the separation has moved from routes to positive radar-based controller separation. No more visual separation.

**Sen. Cantwell:** What's the separation? How much?

**Bedford:** Separation is defined by both lateral and vertical boundaries.

**Sen. Cantwell:** What is it?

**Bedford:** Half a mile or, sorry -- 500 feet and one and a half miles.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Yeah, I'm not sure that -- [we need] to look more into that. I'm not sure that gets the job done, given the off course nature of where -- if you have different equipment and it's not standardized...I'll leave it to my pilot colleague here, maybe to chime in, but I don't know that that gets the job done if you have different equipment. And one of the things that the NTSB said, which I thought was so striking, was the fact that there may be an issue with the helicopter altitude equipment being affected by the rotors and the amount of air flow that they were making. Coming from an aviation state, I can tell you that all of these details on technology and how they function and whether they give you the right information is critically important. So I still have concerns, but I certainly want us to get a solution, and I don't want to wait in the commercial space for...I want us to mandate this and move forward in the commercial space. Do you support that? I'm talking now about the implementation of ADS-B In and Out.

**Bedford:** Yeah, so again, we provided all the technical assistance to both bills. I'm on the record, and I'll say it again, I prefer more situational awareness than less. I think there are ADS-B In solutions that can be implemented quickly for less than \$5,000 an aircraft.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, for GA maybe, but I'm asking about commercial aircraft that you regulate...

**Bedford:** No, this will work on commercial airliners as well, using electronic flight bags.

**Sen. Cantwell:** So, you think they should go with a [tablet]?

**Bedford:** No, I think we should go with an electronic flight bag. They're different.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, so are you saying that you think that should be deployed right now in commercial?

**Bedford:** I'm saying that let's not make the perfect the enemy of the good.

**Sen. Cantwell:** I'm definitely thinking the FAA should every day wake up and say, how am I going to make the flying public safe? And use whatever tools and management...I think we've been too hands off, and I think this committee has played a big oversight role over the last five years in trying to get the FAA to do its oversight. So I think what would be great, Mr. Chairman, is if you and the Ranking Member here could get those recommendations in writing as to what we actually are going to see from the FAA in a timeline about that implementation. I think, for us today, knowing what commercial you're recommending, and what day, and what time.

**Bedford:** I think we've given that to you.

**Sen. Cantwell:** Okay, what is the day and time you're going to implement this system for commercial flights?

**Bedford:** For ADS-B In? That is under evaluation. I can't give you a deadline on that. What I've given you...when I can give you a deadline, I have. I've told you what's completed by the end of the year.

**Sen. Cantwell:** And I'm saying we want a deadline [for ADS-B In]. I think the issue is that when you're looking at this suggestion...we mandated this a long time ago, it just never really got implemented. And then people said, oh well, it costs too much and the airlines can't do it. And I'm pretty sure my attitude after this crash is the lives of these individuals were worth it and if we don't fix this it is on us. So we should be setting a deadline for what we think commercial aviation should meet this, and we should be telling the military they have to live up to these recommendations. So I think something where we're saying you don't know yet, because you don't know when it can be implemented. We just...I'm sorry, but we have to go back to the drawing table.

Mr. Chairman, I see my colleagues arriving, and I've used up well past my five minutes, but I do have other questions for the record, specifically about drones and MOUs... how the FAA airspace and [having] clear standards, particularly with the World Cup coming up in a few weeks. We had a recent report saying a high energy counter drone system may be deployed at Kitsap Base in the State of Washington. As Administrator, what steps are you taking to ensure the air space is properly protected? So, big issue coming up in Puget Sound. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

**Sen. Moran:** You're welcome, Senator Cantwell. Let me just follow up for the moment with Senator Cantwell's point. I don't know what an air bag, whatever your terminology is? Tell me, what you just recommended to Senator Cantwell, that you're ready to do?

**Bedford:** What I'm saying is whatever we do that doesn't come...whether it comes through a statutory change or not, will require rulemaking, and that rulemaking process is somewhere between two and four years. I think we can get to a much quicker deployment of a solution where I think we can get high compliance from the industry without a...

**Sen. Moran:** On voluntary basis?

**Bedford:** On a voluntary basis. I think we can do that exceptionally quickly.

**Sen. Moran:** And what is that solution?

**Bedford:** That is a solution that would, would bring both ADS-B alerting and aural warnings to the cockpit through electronic flight bag usage.

**Sen. Moran:** Flight bag?

**Sen. Cantwell:** So, I think, Mr. Chairman, if I could, the difference's here -- our committee long ago said we wanted this implemented in all commercial aircraft. And so I think our House colleagues have discussed the fact that they would like a solution that would work for general aviation, where you might have an [tablet] -- a little bit bigger than this [tablet] device -- that might be able to deploy some more intelligence on the conflicts and some alert warnings. And so when asking the Administrator, when would we implement whatever his recommendation is -- he doesn't... I'm not clear which one of those he's going to recommend for commercial, which I think we should know the answer. I think we get full ADS-B In and Out for all commercial aircraft, and we've known this for a long time. The NTSB [Chair] told us to do it. We should do it, and we need to hone in on a solution. And I know Chairman Cruz is not here at the moment, but I know he's been following this issue closely, and we will work to get a committee focus on this.

But I think what we owe the families who are here in the audience today...is an answer where we know how long something's going to take, and what technology we're going to try to standardize on, and an answer by the FAA. And I hope that out of this hearing today, Mr. Chairman, that we can get the crispness of that recommendation, because we don't want to have this variation. I'm not even sure that the technology that he's suggesting is a good idea in commercial aircraft. It might be okay for GA, it might be, but I'm pretty sure that if it was such a great solution for commercial aviation, we probably would have already done it, and somebody would have said, "Here's an off-the-shelf solution that I can just carry my [tablet] and I know what the distance is from other aircraft." I think it's going to be these issues that we've dealt with, with cockpit awareness and alerts and over-taxing. The information age is definitely creating over-taxing in the cockpit. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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