

**TESTIMONY OF BRYAN BEDFORD, ADMINISTRATOR
FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION**

**HEARING BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION, SPACE, AND INNOVATION**

**FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION RESPONSE TO THE NATIONAL
TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD FINAL REPORT ON THE DCA ACCIDENT**

Chairman Moran, Ranking Member Duckworth, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the response of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) final report on the accident that occurred near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA).

I want to begin by recognizing the families of those lost on Flight 5342 and the U.S. Army Blackhawk. Their loss is a constant reminder, to me, of the severe consequences when our aviation system falls short, and it is what drives the urgency behind the actions we are taking.

President Trump, Secretary Duffy, and I are committed to taking action to address the safety issues identified by the NTSB. The NTSB's final report confirms that our airspace system was providing warning signals prior to that tragic evening. The issue was not a lack of data—it was a failure to translate that data into action. That is the gap we are urgently closing.

We are doing it through the development of a thoughtful, strategic, and sweeping reorganization of the FAA. A reorganization that includes streamlining leadership roles, eliminating silos which hinder transparency and information sharing, and developing a clear and measurable Flight Plan to guide agency-wide focus and accountability. Furthermore, we have established an integrated safety management system organization and a comprehensive modernization of our aging air traffic control system, to include: boosting air traffic controller staffing; replacing all our obsolete equipment over the next three years; and addressing a long overdue redesign of our nation's airspace operations.

With respect to DCA, immediately following the accident, the FAA restricted helicopter operations in the National Capital Region, eliminated high-risk mixed traffic procedures, and closed routes that introduced unnecessary operational complexity. We have also increased support, oversight, and staffing for the DCA air traffic control team, reduced the hourly arrival rate and total daily operations at the airport, and strengthened requirements for ADS-B Out usage to improve aircraft visibility and system accountability in the region's airspace. Finally, and with the complete support of the Department of War (DOW), we have eliminated all non-essential military helicopter operations in the DCA airspace.

We then expanded our review across the National Airspace System (NAS).

Using advanced data analysis and AI-enabled tools, we evaluated airports nationwide where helicopters routinely intersect arrival and departure paths in high-density airspace. That analysis revealed that we had a structural reliance on visual separation in environments where it is not sufficient to mitigate airborne risk.

Those findings led us to implement a system-wide corrective action.

In March of this year, we issued a General Notice—GENOT—to air traffic controllers that suspends the use of visual separation between helicopters and airplanes in Class B, Class C, and Terminal Radar Service Area airspace. Controllers are now required to use radar-based, positive separation standards, maintaining defined lateral and vertical distances between aircraft.

This is not merely a procedural adjustment. It is a fundamental change in how we manage traffic separation in complex airspace.

Regarding controller staffing, last year, Secretary Duffy announced a controller hiring surge. In 2025, we placed over 2,000 qualified candidates into our academy. This year, we will place another 2,200 qualified candidates into our academy, and next year another 2,300. Over the past year we have more than doubled our collegiate training partners in the Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative, to a total of eleven schools, to further expand our pipelines of well-trained, future controllers. I expect to add another five partner schools this year.

We are also beginning the process of aligning staffing with operational demand. The measure is not simply headcount focused—it is a realistic analysis of each facility’s staffing capacity to appropriately manage traffic demands and then balancing demand to a safe level. We applied this same logic to determine our demand reduction targets during the 43-day government shutdown.

More work is required to address our chronic controller staffing challenges. This work is guided by a comprehensive controller workforce plan recently submitted to Congress—not a recycled report from prior decades, but a forward-looking, clear-eyed strategy intended to finally resolve our staffing shortages which have long challenged the FAA.

More broadly, we have undertaken a comprehensive reorganization of the FAA. That effort is designed to break down long-standing silos, increase transparency, and strengthen accountability to ensure that safety and operational data move across the agency without delay. It is a fundamental structural change in how the FAA functions, not simply a reshuffling of existing roles.

As part of that broader reorganization, we have established a new Aviation Safety Management System Organization. This office reports directly to me and leads the FAA’s implementation of a single, agency-wide SMS. It is a key element of the reorganization and ensures that hazard identification, risk analysis, and mitigation tracking are unified across the enterprise. It replaces

fragmented and ineffective processes with a consistent framework so that we see and act on safety intelligence, in real time, in a disciplined and repeatable way.

We are also changing how we manage the NAS.

Historically, the system has been managed tactically—responding to capacity constraints as they occur. That approach is not sufficient for the complexity we manage today. Constraints are driven by multiple interacting factors—including staffing and infrastructure limitations. We must manage this “balancing process” in a more coordinated and forward-looking way. Simply put, we need to move from a purely tactical air traffic management system to a strategic one.

Last month, at the Modern Skies Summit held at the Department of Transportation headquarters, I discussed the vision for moving to a SMART NAS. SMART stands for Strategic Management of Airspace, Routing, and Trajectories. SMART along with a new Common Automation Platform would significantly help reduce airspace congestion and provide controllers with the tools they need to safely increase airspace capacity. The objective is straightforward: treat the NAS as a single, complex organism, then strategically optimize and balance NAS demand so that we can address challenges presented by conflicting flight plans and scheduling practices before a single flight leaves the ground.

This effort has strong support from President Trump and Secretary Duffy, who have made rebuilding our National Airspace System to be the best in class, a clear priority. This Administration has enabled the FAA to move with a level of urgency and focus that would not otherwise be possible. Their leadership and commitment to aviation safety and modernization have been critical in overcoming inertia and building momentum across these efforts.

With the \$12.5 billion provided by Congress, we are transitioning from an analog to a digital NAS. That work is progressing on an accelerated timeline, supported by President Trump’s and Secretary Duffy’s leadership.

However, were we to stop at replacing obsolete equipment and increasing our controller staffing to healthy levels, we would still not have a world leading aviation system—we need to redesign our airspace and automation capabilities to ensure the new system functions as a unified whole. We need 21st century design, automation tools, and to move from our present, limited, on-premises computing power to a fully cyber-secure, cloud-based architecture with unlimited computing power to achieve President Trump’s vision to provide Americans with the very best aviation system in the world.

To complete this transition, we must urgently address the FAA’s underlying data architecture limitations and implement a Common Automation Platform—the automation system that our controllers use to monitor and guide flights across that NAS. Without it, controllers will continue operating with fragmented, non-interoperable systems that limit integration, increase their workloads, and reduce their effectiveness. In short, if we stop at what is funded from the \$12.5B,

we will have a highly reliable yet still grossly inefficient NAS; one that is incapable of accommodating the needs of our growing economy.

With more than 18,000,000 flights managed and over one billion passenger movements traveling across our skies annually, our current system has reached its limits. Without a doubt, the U.S. aviation system is recognized as the largest and most complex aviation system in the world. However, now we face the additional demands of drones, advanced air mobility, supersonic operations, and a near daily cadence of space launches. I appeal to you, on behalf of the American traveling public, to urgently provide the critical funding, which is necessary to continue building our momentum to complete the modernization of our skies by 2028.

I want to thank NTSB Chair Homendy and team who produced the final report on the DCA accident. The report provides many clear findings. The FAA has taken concrete actions implementing a number of its key recommendations. To complete this work, we will need sustained investment, flexibility in funding, and continued coordination with Congress.

I also want to thank the families of Flight 5342 for their tireless and effective advocacy. Secretary Duffy and I pledge to work with you, and this Congress, to assist in its efforts to enact vital aviation safety legislation, which will help the FAA in its efforts to transform this precious resource which is our National Airspace System.

I believe everyone gathered here today agrees the American public deserves a system that is safe, reliable, efficient, and capable of meeting the future demands of our innovation economy. Working together, with this Committee's leadership and financial support, the men and women of the Federal Aviation Administration pledge to meet the challenge of delivering a brand new air traffic control system at unprecedented speed.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions.