



**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON
COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION**
Senator Maria Cantwell, Chair

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**Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation**

Hearing: Addressing Close Calls to Improve Aviation Safety

November 9, 2023

Opening Remarks
[VIDEO](#)

CANTWELL: Thank you, Senator Duckworth, and thank you to Senator Moran for this important hearing. I can't think of two people better prepared to lead the safety charge and aviation charge on our Committee than the two of you. So thank you for doing this hearing. I so agree with both of your comments. I think you outlined exactly why we're here this morning, that it is a constant task to be on top of innovation and safety and competitiveness.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here too because I think they are very illuminating of the challenges that we faced in the past, and how we met them, and what we need to do today. So I thank all of them for that.

The Aircraft Certification, Safety, and Accountability Act outlined some new ways in which we can improve safety. One of those was to basically say that we should have a trend report every year to better listen to some of the safety trends.

This hearing this morning is really a reflection of that. It's about what trend we're seeing now and why we want to do more to fix it.

So I want to applaud the NTSB for their leadership on this particular issue of near-misses. I think that they have sounded the alarm and I think that you're sounding it again today. And it's one of the reasons why as Senator Moran said, we need to get an FAA Reauthorization bill because it has some tools in that bill that will help us meet this challenge.

First and foremost, NTSB Chair Homendy is basically saying in her testimony, for controllers, we have cited staffing shortages, which lead to scheduling issues, fatigue, lack of or deficient supervisory oversight, distraction, ineffective scanning, and the need for value-added training. That's a summation of her testimony.

That is why we need the additional FAA Air Traffic Controllers that are in the FAA bill of over 3,000 people to help us meet this balance. We cannot have people working 6 days a week. We need people who have the ample amount of rest and capability to deal with, as my colleague Senator Duckworth said, probably one of the most stressful and challenging jobs there is.

Secondly, I think Ms. Homendy also outlines correctly the important attributes of the air surface detection equipment program (ASDE-X) that is a ground radar and electronic technology that allows controllers to track surface movement of aircraft and vehicles. And in the airports where we have this technology, guess what, things have worked well. The areas where we haven't, this is why we need this legislation because we are authorizing \$18.2 billion to make sure that all of our large and mid-sized airports have this technology and have this technology deployed.

I'm sure we're going to hear other comments this morning and other answers, but two of them lie right in front of us.

And I'm with Senator Moran, we should get this job done and continue to move forward. I'm a believer as he is, that aviation is going to continue to grow. And we want it to. And that the international competition is also going to be there.

We have to lead, get it right, and demonstrate that we have the capacity to grow in the future and to get it to be the safest aviation system in the world.

Question Segment

VIDEO

Witnesses:

Jennifer Homendy, Chair, National Transportation Safety Board

Tim Arel, Chief Operating Officer, Federal Aviation Administration Air Traffic Organization

Rich Santa, President, National Air Traffic Controller Association

Capt. Jason Ambrosi, President, Air Line Pilots Association

Randy Babbitt, Principal Partner, Babbitt & Associates, LLC

Senator Cantwell: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Capt. Ambrosi, pilots have rest requirements. Why is that?

Capt. Ambrosi: Because we need rest. We absolutely need rest. And, you know, out of the 2010 bill, there were a lot of reforms. Not just pilot training, but we went to a science-based fatigue, flight and duty time, rest rules about eight years ago. And it's been a success because now it's based on science, not some arbitrary number where it limits our duty day instead of just flight time. But you know, having an adequately rested pilot or controller or anyone that's a frontline worker is essential.

Senator Cantwell: Well, that's where I was going. Because to your side there is the chair of the NTSB. And she's saying she's worried about their fatigue level. So as a Captain, you're worried about the air traffic controller fatigue system?

Capt. Ambrosi: I think Rich is probably better to comment on how their scheduling goes because I'm not an expert in air traffic control scheduling, but I can tell you as a pilot, our rest is essential. So I would imagine it would be similar for them.

Senator Cantwell: Thank you.

So I wanted to ask about this also... The Air Surface Detection Equipment model. One of the things the technology does do is it helps illuminate the risks, and certainly in a busy environment, and certainly one in which people are paying attention to lots of different things, the fact that it can be more illuminating visual, so that it's getting people's attention is also part of this system.

We have in the Senate bill increased the funding to \$18.2 billion over five years, and an increase that would put money to, as I said earlier, upgrade all the large and mid-size airports. I'm assuming all of you support this investment. But if you could just give me a verbal yes.

Ms. Homendy: Yes, but we'd also like technology in the cockpit of an airplane.

Senator Cantwell: The same technology you're saying?

Ms. Homendy: There are is direct alerting technology to pilots that can alert them that they're on the wrong runway, that they're on a taxiway, or that there's something in front of them.

Senator Cantwell: Ok, just down the line, do you support this language that's in the bill.

Capt. Ambrosi: Absolutely.

Mr. Santa: Absolutely. Thank you.

Mr. Arel: Absolutely.

Mr. Babbitt: Yes, Senator.

Senator Cantwell: Ok. My understanding is it takes almost a year to get all of this implemented, even if we got this bill passed right now. So I'm assuming Chairwoman Homendy that you think this is something we should work with and dispatch to get this technology deployed as soon as possible?

Ms. Homendy: Absolutely. It has prevented some almost accidents. And so we need the technology. Again, we need technology for air traffic controllers, but we also need technology in the cockpit of airplanes.

Senator Cantwell: But the situational awareness, I think, Mr. Babbitt, back to the original NextGen days, the whole concept about NextGen is to digitize our system off of the radar system.

But the whole aspect of it on the ground that would also give you situational awareness was one of the things trumpeted by the bill. And we can sit here all day and probably think about why we're in this situation of near-misses, I think you described it accurately, you're coming out of the COVID and ramping up traffic, and we have situations where we don't have the workforce that maybe would give us the rest time.

But we do know that we have technology solutions that if we just got them deployed this would help.

Ms. Homendy: And usually what I hear when I talk about technology is it's too expensive, and we don't have the resources. We have to give the FAA the resources to invest. They need those resources. So we are strongly supportive of giving them the funding that they need to succeed at their jobs.