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COMMITTEE ON
**TRANSPORTATION
& INFRASTRUCTURE**

SAM GRAVES, CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

Chairman Nehls Statement from Hearing on Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems

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Washington, D.C. - *Opening remarks, as prepared, of Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Troy E. Nehls (R-TX) from today's hearing entitled, "Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems":*

I regret to be opening my first hearing as the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Aviation in the wake of two tragic aviation accidents that claimed 74 souls last week here in our nation's capital and in Philadelphia. This past week has been devastating for the aviation community and the traveling public. Our thoughts and prayers remain with the victims and their families, and with all who have been affected by the accidents that occurred.

I'd like to personally thank all of the first responders and the investigators that continue to bring facts to light in both accidents. Thank you for your continued service and dedication to delivering answers to the victims' families and loved ones.

There will be a time and place to review the NTSB's findings and to discuss how best to ensure that the appropriate safeguards are in place to protect against such tragedies from happening again. In the meantime, the Aviation Subcommittee will continue monitoring developments as the investigations unfold, and will work to keep Members apprised of new information.

With that said, I'd like to thank our witnesses for appearing today. You all bring unique insights and perspectives to the table, and I look forward to a robust discussion on the current landscape of counter-UAS technologies in this country.

Unmanned aircraft systems (UAS), also known as “drones,” are extremely popular among the American people, so much so that there are more than one million drones registered with the FAA. And this number is expected to grow in the coming years. Drones are increasingly being used by aviation hobbyists, professional photographers, real estate professionals, and law enforcement officials. Drone as First Responder (DFR) programs have proven to be a crucial tool for law enforcement officials in their mission to protect and serve their communities in a timely and efficient manner.

Additionally, drones have the potential to transform the delivery of essential goods, such as medicines, and commercial goods to our communities. That said, the wide-scale integration of small drones into our airspace at low altitudes poses unique challenges both on the ground and in our nation's airspace.

Such challenges were brought to the forefront recently in New Jersey, where over the course of a few short weeks in December, more than 5,000 reported drone sightings were submitted to local, state, and federal authorities.

While federal authorities and the Trump Administration have made it clear that there were no nefarious drones and that the operators were authorized, the fact of the matter is that authorities received 5,000 reports. 5,000 reports is significant and telling of the fact that the aviation community must better educate the public about lawful drone operations.

But make no mistake, the recent events in New Jersey have highlighted the ease with which bad actors could utilize drones with nefarious and malicious intent or conduct illicit drone operations. We must continue to support and foster new aviation technologies – the future of American aviation depends on it. That responsibility includes ensuring the appropriate and safe use of counter-UAS technologies in the nation's airspace by authorized users to make certain that civil aviation safety is not jeopardized.

With the increasing rate of drones expected to integrate into our airspace and the potential for their misuse by bad actors, now is the time to establish a properly scaled, well-balanced, and legally sound framework for counter-drone authorities and the corresponding technologies.

That is why this Committee worked with the Committees on Homeland Security and the Judiciary last Congress to produce a comprehensive package to reform and reasonably expand the existing counter-drone authorities granted to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

As a former law enforcement official, I was pleased to see that the legislation included a counter-UAS mitigation pilot program for state and local law enforcement, marking the first time counter-drone authorities may be delegated to non-federal entities. I was also pleased that we were able to expand upon and improve that pilot program at markup so that more law enforcement agencies were able to protect more sites.

While we were unable to get the bill over the finish line last year, I look forward to working with all stakeholders and other Committees to further improve the bill.

I again want to thank our witnesses for their willingness to appear before us today. Your expertise in the use and development of these systems will prove critical to the Subcommittee as we continue our efforts to address the threats posed by unauthorized or unlawful UAS operations.

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