

From: Transportation Committee Republicans
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COMMITTEE ON

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

SAM GRAVES, CHAIRMAN

PRESS RELEASE

Chairmen Graves & Nehls Opening Statements from Hearing on Air Traffic Control System Infrastructure and Staffing

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Washington, D.C. - *Opening remarks, as prepared, of Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves (R-MO) and Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Troy E. Nehls (R-TX) from today's hearing entitled, "America Builds: Air Traffic Control System Infrastructure and Staffing":*

Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Sam Graves

Today's hearing topic should not come as a surprise to anyone. Our nation's air traffic control system (ATC) is outdated, and it must be modernized for the benefit and safety of all users of the National Airspace System. While this issue has been thrust back into the spotlight following a string of tragic accidents, this is not a new debate.

As a committee, we must decide how to utilize advancements in technology to supplement the daily work done by our dedicated air traffic controllers in the towers and the centers. I look forward to working with fellow Members and stakeholders to find commonsense solutions that will improve the hiring of controllers, boost the air traffic control system, and advance safety for the flying public.

Furthermore, I am excited that both President Trump and Secretary Duffy have voiced their support for historic investments in air traffic control facilities and technologies. This moment represents a unique opportunity to transform our air traffic system.

The *FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024* contained provisions designed to bolster aviation safety and modernize our air traffic control system by requiring the FAA to annually hire the maximum number of air traffic controllers from the agency's ATC training academy, requiring the FAA to conduct an audit of all legacy systems in use by the agency, and mandating that the agency develop a plan to accelerate the replacement of those legacy systems.

However, it is incumbent upon Congress to build upon these provisions in the FAA bill and take a hard look at the way FAA invests in and modernizes our nation's ATC system in order to improve safety and strengthen America's leadership in aviation.

I was pleased to see that industry stakeholders recently signaled their support for a consensus-driven approach to modernizing our ATC system backed by airlines, unions, general aviation, and many others.

We simply cannot allow past issues that divided Congress and industry stakeholders to distract us from getting something done. We must work together, and I fully intend to do just that.

I'd like to thank our witnesses again for their willingness to lend us their expertise as we continue this important discussion.

Aviation Subcommittee Chairman Troy E. Nehls

Good morning and thank you to our panel of witnesses for being here today. Your testimony will no doubt provide valuable insight into today's critical discussion on air traffic control infrastructure and staffing. I want to be very clear: the reason that we are here today is that, in its current form, this country's air traffic control system is unsustainable.

That statement shouldn't come as a surprise to those in this room. In fact, many of the panelists before us today have been ringing the alarm bell for decades on the need for ATC modernization, increased hiring of controllers, and stable funding streams for the FAA.

Dating back to 1995, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has classified the FAA's efforts to modernize our ATC system as "high-risk." While efforts have been made to address this deep-rooted issue since the nineties, it's clear they've fallen short.

I say that not to heap blame, but to make it clear that we're not much closer to a solution than we were in 1995. We need to rewrite the previous playbook and begin digging out of the hole that we've found ourselves in. This moment in time represents a unique opportunity for the Members of this subcommittee and all aviation stakeholders to coalesce around a common goal: meaningful air traffic control modernization that will benefit the flying public and all users of the National Airspace System.

At the request of this subcommittee, GAO undertook a more recent study on the FAA's air traffic control system. Published just last year, the report noted the urgent need to modernize aging systems and found that 51 of the agency's 138 ATC systems were "unsustainable," or roughly 37 percent of systems; 54 of the agency's 138 ATC systems were "potentially unsustainable," or roughly 39 percent systems; and of those 105 systems identified as "unsustainable" or "potentially unsustainable," 58 have critical operational impacts on the safety and efficiency of the national airspace.

For a country that considers itself the gold standard in aviation safety, these numbers are unacceptable, and we must do better. While it's easy to lay blame at the feet of the FAA, and their project management is certainly not blameless, we also have to look at our own shortfalls.

With a finite capital budget and unstable funding, the agency is forced into the impossible predicament of having to dedicate vast amounts of money on simply sustaining old and outdated systems, leaving little left over for capital improvement projects.

Furthermore, it is admittedly a technical challenge to modernize a robust system, with little to no interruption, that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year, and transports almost 3 million passengers daily. Solving this problem will require the support of all parties involved. However, if we're all pulling in the same direction, I have no doubt Congress can rise to the occasion.

Much like Chairman Graves, and I suspect many others in this room, I was thrilled to hear that President Trump and Secretary Duffy have voiced their support for historic investments in air traffic control facilities and technologies.

In keeping with the theme of today's hearing, America Builds, and the President's promise on building physical infrastructure, this is a truly unique opportunity to modernize our air traffic system. Once again, I'd like to thank our witnesses for being here today and look forward to their testimony as we tackle one of the largest issues facing the long-term success of the aviation industry in this country.

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