

Rotor Operations Transparency and Oversight Reform (ROTOR) Act

Reforming Operations of Tactical and Emergency Helicopters to Eliminate Risk and Improve Safety near Airports

Introduced in the Senate on July 29, 2025

Senators Ted Cruz (R-TX), Jerry Moran (R-KS), Roger Marshall (R-KS), Eric Schmitt (R-MO), Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)

The Problem

The midair collision between American Airlines Flight 5342 and an Army Black Hawk helicopter on January 29th was preventable. For decades, the airspace around the Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) operated without an accident, but with thousands of close calls that resulted in no preventative actions.

The Black Hawk was likely operating in congested airspace without Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B) Out—a satellite beacon technology that can transmit location, altitude, velocity, and other information to air traffic control or other nearby aircraft faster than radar or other transponders.

Military aircraft must not play by different rules. The airspace is only as safe as its least equipped aircraft.

The Solution: The ROTOR Act

The ROTOR Act improves aviation safety, addresses FAA knowledge and oversight of ADS-B Out, and directs the Army Inspector General (OIG) to reevaluate its aviation safety practices. The bill requires:

1. **All aircraft operators to equip with ADS-B In technology and transmit such information.** ADS-B In is a technology for aircraft to receive location signals from other nearby aircraft and ground technology, improving safety in the sky and on runways.
2. **Closes Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) loophole that permitted the Army Black Hawk to forego broadcasting ADS-B Out.** The ROTOR Act only allows the FAA to only grant exceptions for “sensitive government missions”, not training flights.
3. **Requires the FAA to review helicopter routes near airports.** Helicopters and airplanes fly near each other at large and small airports—the FAA should comprehensively evaluate the airspace at congested airports across the country.
4. **Directs the Army OIG to initiate a safety coordination audit.** The Army Inspector General has declined to review the Army’s aviation safety practices voluntarily. The Inspector General should conduct an independent review of the Army’s approach to safety.
5. **Initiates FAA study on dynamic restricted area for helicopters near airports.** The FAA can review whether audio and visual signals could be deployed to reduce airspace confusion and avoid traffic conflicts.
6. **Repeals an exception in the Fiscal Year 2019 NDAA that exempted the Department of Defense from enacted ADS-B transmission requirements.**

Why This Matters

The tragic midair collision earlier this year exposed serious and systemic weaknesses in how civilian and military aircraft share and operate in congested airspace. While the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) continues its investigation, the initial findings show glaring failures in oversight and coordination which must be addressed now, not later. The bill was drafted in direct response to the operational shortcomings that led to the midair collision.

Deconflicting congested airspace and establishing better communication standards between civilian and military aircraft is not optional—it is essential. The ROTOR Act does exactly that, ensuring American skies remain the safest in the world.