

Opening Statement to the
Senate Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Aviation Safety, Operations and Innovation
Hearing on “Strengthening the Aviation Workforce”

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Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the challenges and opportunities to strengthen the aviation workforce. As the EY US Aerospace & Defense Sector Leader, I have the honor of working with some of the largest and most innovative aerospace and defense companies in the US to meet their growth, operations, and talent objectives. In my role I also lead EY’s collaboration with the Aerospace Industries Association (AIA) annual workforce survey. My comments will include results from the survey which I ask to submit as part of my written testimony.

I should note at the outset that any commentary reflects my personal views and is not intended to reflect the views of Ernst & Young, LLP.

The 2022 AIA workforce survey reaffirms the industry’s challenges, many of which are well known and some of which have been or will be discussed today by my fellow panelists. Among the challenges presented in the report, would like to emphasize three today:

- First, the survey highlights the challenges and drivers of attrition, attraction, and retention. While engineering & technical schools are generating new talent, a sizeable portion of this talent is lost to other industries, such as technology, offering higher compensation, faster career progression, enhanced flexibility, and other benefits. The challenge to attract and retain talent is more pronounced in the lower tiers of supply chain that deliver components and parts of aircraft and various subsystems.
- Second, the survey points out the need for talent to be upskilled and re-skilled to support the aviation workforce of the future. Currently there is a gap within the workforce’s current capacity and capabilities, which is exacerbated by the evolution of desired skillsets required for the future. These future skills include more digital, artificial intelligence, machine learning, data science, and automation capabilities.

- Third, competitive pressure in the aerospace industry is growing around the globe. European aerospace companies continue to expand their share and content on global aircraft market – which helps them fund new aircraft and technology development. Asia is accelerating the growth and maturation of its indigenous aerospace industry with advances in airframe, avionics, propulsion, and aircraft systems, and will have competitive offerings in the future. Regions and countries that have a ready and capable workforce will have a competitive advantage.

The enduring success of our aerospace industry has been the steady stream of top-tier talent from every corner of the country. To retain the lead, aerospace needs to grow its ability to attract and retain this talent in the face of intense competition. As the survey shows, companies are adapting to this challenge by offering more flexible working models and growing more diverse to leverage new talent sources.

The survey also informs that more can be done, for example:

- Support the efforts to build excitement in commercial aerospace. Industry observers believe that there are at least two broad commercial aerospace areas that can drive excitement – next generation air transport aircraft for medium to long-range travel using conventional architecture but advanced technologies, and urban/advanced air mobility involving newer architectures and the supporting infrastructure. Both areas offer opportunities for innovation; experience around opportunities to make an impact -- to make a difference. We recognize that Congress is having debates around some of these topics. We believe Congress' focus on attracting and re-skilling the workforce of the future is a worthwhile endeavor.
- Enable the expansion of eligible workforce pool. This could include facilitating access to other talent pools across various geographies and demographics and industries, promoting efforts to create access to education for early career professionals and re-skilling.

I applaud this committee for engaging on aviation workforce issues during such a critical time. As the US shifts from a COVID-centered footing, the demand for commercial aerospace talent is surging back. Air traffic has begun to return – IATA January press release shows that global domestic passenger traffic is at 97% of 2019 level, and international traffic is at 77% of 2019 level and growing.

While we may not have a demand problem, the survey indicates that we do have a workforce supply problem. This discussion to strengthen the aviation workforce is a vital part of the aerospace industry's future. I am honored to join you here today. Thank you.