

**Statement of Chairman Sam Graves
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Nomination of Michael Whitaker to be Administrator of the Federal Aviation
Administration (FAA) Hearing
Wednesday, October 4, 2023**

Chairman Graves Opening Statement:

Thank you, Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, and Members of the Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to introduce Michael Whitaker - the nominee for Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

This is a critical time for aviation and for the FAA.

Steadfast leadership at the FAA is paramount if we – as a Nation – are to remain the global leader in aviation innovation and safety. A goal that I know this Committee and this nominee unequivocally support.

It's been a year-and-a-half since the previous Administrator, Steve Dickson, stepped down. This Administration has waited far too long to nominate a qualified nominee, leaving the more than 45,000 public servants at the FAA without a permanent leader, jeopardizing American leadership in aviation, and – frankly – risking public safety.

Safety is dependent on consistency, and unfortunately, the only thing that's been consistent at the agency since former Administrator Dickson's departure is the growing list of "acting" positions across the agency.

18 months without an FAA Administrator is unacceptable.

The American people deserve a confirmed leader who has a deep knowledge in, and passion for, aviation.

Because of that, I'm honored and pleased to introduce Michael Whitaker, a qualified nominee that has been put forward for your consideration.

Mr. Whitaker is currently the Chief Operating Officer for an advanced air mobility company – an aviation sector that is propelling American aviation to new heights and demands both regulatory stability and innovation.

Having previously served as the FAA Deputy Administrator, Mr. Whitaker understands what it takes to helm the agency he's been nominated to lead.

He has also served for many years in the travel and airline industries.

And I appreciate the fact that he, too, is a private pilot. Having spoken with and gotten to know Mr. Whitaker over the years, I know he understands the need to ensure that our shared passion for general aviation is passed on to the next generation of Americans.

The bottom line is that having Mr. Whitaker confirmed as FAA Administrator will help provide much needed certainty for the FAA and aviation industry at this pivotal moment in history.

In addition to confirmation of an FAA nominee, enacting a long-term FAA reauthorization bill will also bring much needed certainty to the aviation industry.

The bipartisan bill that passed out of the House in July by a vote of 351 to 69 is a five-year bill. And while your Committee works towards passage of companion legislation, our shared commitment to enactment of a long-term FAA bill guarantees that the next Administrator will be charged with implementing the final product of our work. This adds enormous consequence to this nomination and responsibility for Mr. Whitaker, if confirmed.

I want to be clear – I fully expect that if confirmed as the Administrator, Mr. Whitaker and I will not agree on everything. However, I believe we can and will have a strong working relationship, just as I have with his predecessors.

And like his predecessors from both Democrat and Republican Administrations, I want to see him be successful in this role because that is what is in the best interest of the American aviation industry and, more importantly, the American people.

It is why I fought hard against the previous nominee, whose lack of relevant experience was greatly concerning, and why I am here today supporting Mr. Whitaker. Because I believe he is the right man for the job.

As the Chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, my job is to hold the Administration, and any Administrator of the FAA, accountable for their actions, to conduct rigorous oversight, and to ensure they are following the legislative intent of any law Congress passes.

And rest assured, I will do just that.

But I also want to express my support for this Committee's consideration today of a nominee who has extensive qualifications in the aviation field and who is very familiar with the FAA – its importance, its intricacies, and its shortcomings.

I believe Mr. Whitaker has the level of experience that the position of FAA Administrator demands and is prepared to deliver the strong leadership that is needed at the FAA today more than ever before.

Thank you for your time. It is my hope the Committee favorably considers Mr. Whitaker's nomination and acts swiftly on finalizing its FAA reauthorization bill.