

Prepared Statement of Stephen M. Dickson, Nominated as Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration

Thank you, Chairman Wicker, Ranking Member Cantwell and members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you today as the President's nominee for Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration. If confirmed, I look forward to working with you and the Congress to enable and empower the strengthening of our world-class aviation system.

I appreciate the kind and generous introduction submitted by Senator Isakson. I am humbled by this nomination and the opportunity to serve our nation. I'd like to thank President Trump and Secretary Chao for their confidence in me to lead the FAA during this very important time. I would also like to thank my good friend, Acting FAA Administrator Dan Elwell, for his strong, principled leadership of the agency.

Before I begin my formal remarks, I would like to introduce this very attractive-looking group of people sitting right behind me: my family—starting with the Dickson family CEO and the love of my life, my wife Janice. We are also blessed with our six children, several of whom are with us here today: our sons Andrew, Nicholas, Ben and his wife Emily; and our daughters Elizabeth and Bri, as well as Bri's husband Jordan. And then of course is the star of the show, our grandson the esteemed Henry Treadwell Strain, who celebrated his first birthday on April 27th. Thank you all for being here and for your love and support.

I grew up in a family with a strong military tradition, a family that places a very high value on service to our country. My grandfather served in Europe in World War II. My dad is a West Point graduate and is one of four brothers who served as military officers. As we moved around during my childhood to various duty stations Mom was always there to provide a caring, supportive home environment for my brother and me.

My own career in aviation spans nearly 40 years. After graduating from the United States Air Force Academy in 1979, I completed Air Force pilot training and went on to instruct in the T-38 at the Euro-NATO pilot training program at Sheppard Air Force Base, Texas. Then I transitioned to the finest air superiority fighter in the world, the F-15 Eagle, for two assignments, qualifying as an instructor, flight examiner and large force employment mission commander. After completing my military service, I was fortunate to be hired as a pilot by Delta Air Lines, where I flew as a line pilot for the first nine years of my career, eventually qualifying on the B727, B737, B757, B767 and A320 series aircraft. Last October I retired after serving the last 12 years as Senior Vice President-Flight Operations, responsible for the safety and operational performance of the company's global flight operations of more than a million flights a year on six continents, as well as pilot training, crew resources, crew scheduling and regulatory compliance.

In addition to leading large, complex organizations, I have also had the privilege over the years of collaborating with US and international aviation industry leaders to advocate for commercial aviation safety and improvements to our National Airspace System. For example, I have served as chairman of several industry stakeholder groups and Federal advisory committees. In each of these positions, my goal has been to help advance aviation safety and encourage aerospace industry innovation and performance improvement as an inclusive, collaborative leader who values the contributions of all stakeholders who share these goals.

The US aviation system is the most dynamic, diverse and complex in the world and is a key contributor to our economy. For its part, as the safety regulator and operator of the National Airspace System, the FAA provides the programs and infrastructure that help to deliver unprecedented safety, mobility and security to the traveling public. If confirmed, I will work to ensure that FAA remains focused on the Secretary's priorities of safety, infrastructure investment, and innovation, and fulfills its mission with accountability to the American public.

Of all the FAA's priorities, none is higher than safety. If confirmed as FAA Administrator, safety will be my number one priority as well. Despite the enviable track record of aviation safety in the US over the past decade and more, we must never rest. In aviation, you are only as good as your last takeoff and your last landing. Humility is always in order. As the gold standard among aviation safety regulators in the world,

the FAA's responsibilities go well beyond our borders. I look forward to the opportunity to bring to the agency the knowledge and experience I gained in aviation operations and leading international stakeholder groups, as it focuses on continuously improving safety performance, not only for those who use our airspace, but those who use US aviation industry products and services around the world. Safety regulatory decisions should be rooted in analysis derived from sound science and data, with risk-based analysis that identifies precursors and prevents accidents before they happen, and considers both the costs and the benefits of new rulemakings. This Safety Management System approach should be applied to operators, manufacturers, airports and even the FAA itself.

Another area of focus is stakeholder engagement. I have found that the only way to get things done is to foster an inclusive, collaborative environment that welcomes diverse points of view and provides transparency. If confirmed I look forward to working with this Committee and the Congress to ensure you are aware and informed of our progress toward achieving our goals of ensuring safety and fostering innovation and process improvement. Of course, we will also ensure we include all perspectives in our decision-making, including aviation operators, manufacturers, labor, airports, communities and international safety and regulatory organizations.

We also need to recognize that we are in a time of tremendous change but also opportunity. It is important to thoughtfully manage the changes we are experiencing in the aviation system today and in the coming years, so safety is not compromised but innovation and development of new technologies are supported. New technologies, including flight deck automation and air traffic management systems, can provide significant benefit but they also introduce changes to a stable, mature safety system that need to be managed carefully and thoughtfully. Unmanned systems technologies are developing rapidly but the process of scaling the technologies for broad use is in its infancy. Additionally, we are seeing a new generation of aviation industry professionals come into our ranks: pilots, engineers, technicians, developers among others. We need to ensure they have the training and experience required that will continue to raise the safety bar.

There is no doubt that the FAA is the global leader as a safety regulator and as an air navigation service provider. This is not in question. Our system is—by far—the most complex and diverse in the world. The rest of the world looks to the US for leadership and will continue to do so. If confirmed, it will be among my highest priorities to ensure that the FAA maintains its prominence as the global aviation industry leader in safety, continuous improvement and innovation.

Finally, I need to emphasize the importance of focusing on people as we execute our mission. None of what I have discussed up to this point is possible without supporting our people. I have worked with the professionals from the agency for many years, and there is no doubt in my mind we have the most professional, dedicated workforce in the world, whether you are talking about air traffic controllers, inspectors, engineers or technicians. This team has a rare opportunity to shape the transformation of our aviation system. The chance to lead the FAA at this historic time is a great honor, and one that I contemplate with humility and gratitude. If confirmed, I will ensure our people are supported and valued, and that they know I have their back when it comes to safety and new ideas.

If confirmed, I intend to perform my role with accountability to the FAA's stakeholders, including the American public. As stated above safety will always be my first priority. I will also be driven by the values of honesty, integrity and mutual respect.

Thank you for your consideration. I am excited about the opportunity to serve our great nation and appreciate your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions.