



**U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION**  
*Senator Maria Cantwell, Chair*

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**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**

**U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
Executive Session of the FAA Reauthorization Act**

**Thursday, February 8, 2024**

**Opening Statement**  
**[VIDEO](#)**

Good morning. The Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation will come to order. I'd thank all my colleagues for being here and I especially want to thank all of our staffs for their hard work on getting us to this point this morning. I want to thank Ranking Member Cruz for his hard work on this legislation and for much discussion over the last several months on how to continue to make aviation a big priority for us as a nation. I also want to thank the Subcommittee Chair Duckworth and Ranking Member Moran for working together and helping to develop this bipartisan legislation.

We've processed more than 200 amendments and we were able to get agreement on almost 80 amendments, the majority of which were bipartisan.

Our Senate bill addresses many of the pressing needs of our aviation system. We put more FAA safety inspectors on the factory floor, more air traffic controllers in the towers, and we strengthen FAA oversight of foreign repair stations.

We establish mandatory refunds for flight disruptions and prohibit airlines from charging extra for families just to sit together.

We are investing in airport infrastructure and ensuring reliable air service to rural communities throughout the country.

With Senator Lujan's leadership, we are also reauthorizing the NTSB and making sure that it has the resources it needs to do investigations.

For America to be the world leader in aviation, we must set the gold standard. And we have for the most part. But recent events that we have seen put a dent in those safety

issues and we need to make sure that we are doing everything we can to reach the highest standards. We can't take this for granted.

Serving on this Committee, we have a huge responsibility, including working with Senator Wicker on the aviation safety certification bill two years ago. Much of that we need to continue to focus on the FAA for its implementation after we get the FAA Reauthorization. I know that our Committee will be holding many hearings about the recent Alaska incident and hearing from the FAA, the NTSB, from manufacturers, from safety experts and reviewing what else we need to do to make sure that these are at the highest standards.

Our bill requires the FAA in an immediate sense to address issues, finalizing a 25-hour cockpit voice recorder rule. We heard just recently in the aftermath of the Alaska accident that we only had a two-hour recording that had disappeared. We want the NTSB investigators to have all the data that they need.

Our bill invests in the airport surface detection equipment and technology that helps prevent runway close-calls and near-misses. My colleague, Senator Cruz, came with a video even on a near-miss in one of the airports in his state. So getting this implemented and as soon as possible is very critical for our safety improvements.

I want to thank Senator Schatz for his helicopter tour safety bill and Senator Baldwin, Capito and Welch for their Global Aircraft Maintenance Safety Improvement Act. I also want to thank Senator Klobuchar for her leadership on the Air Grants Program in training and skilling a workforce.

This will be the first time Congress is setting refund standards for nonrefundable tickets. You'll be able to get a refund after a 3-hour domestic delay and for a flight that's international after 6 hours of delay.

I want to thank Senators Markey and Vance for working on this, including on the provision that says that families can sit together [at no extra cost.] And I very much appreciate his leadership on that.

We have a new Senate-confirmed Assistant Secretary at the Department of Transportation to look at consumer issues and we are increasing the fines to \$75,000 per violation as a strong deterrent.

I want to thank the Subcommittee Chair, Senator Duckworth, for her incredible work on championing those with disabilities and making sure that the airport experience for them is addressed in this legislation.

Our bill also tries to address aviation grow for the future, a critical aspect of not just new technology but the Airport Improvement Program.

I want to thank Senators Hickenlooper, Rosen, Moran, Thune, Young, and Wicker for their efforts on advanced drones and the legislation here to look at how we move forward.

There is also on fund to innovate new research such as generation aircraft and sustainable aviation fuels.

Thanks to Senators Tester, Fischer, and Sullivan for their hard work on Essential Air Service (EAS) programs.

And our bill ensures robust service connectivity between small and rural communities on EAS and helps small communities thrive. As I've said before, 80 percent of economic development happens within 10 miles of an airport.

If we're not continuing to invest in our airports, then we're not giving communities around the United States of America the ability to continue to grow out our strong economy that we want to continue on after the CHIPS and Science efforts, which was very much about having more innovation in many, many different places of the United States.

We also expand the pipeline of airline industry workers, about five percent of airline pilots are women, and less than 15 percent of pilots and engineers are minorities.

The Aviation Workforce Development Grant Program championed by Senators Klobuchar, Duckworth, Warnock, Moran, Thune, and Peters will help us try to target a population and get more people into this growing sector of the US economy.

And as I mentioned earlier, it is expanding our air traffic control workforce, and addressing the needs of our growing air traffic system.

Again, thanks to all my colleagues. Thanks to all my staff for their hard work on this. I want to especially thank Melissa Porter who has now been through the covid aviation development plan, the infrastructure plan, the ACSAA bill, and now the FAA bill. So I think it's just been a lot of work. Thanks to everybody.