

Testimony of Michael G. Whitaker
Nominee to be the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration
Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

Oct. 4, 2023

Thank you, Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Cruz, Members of the Committee. It is an honor to appear before you today as President Biden's nominee for Administrator of the FAA.

I'm grateful for the bipartisan introductions and support from my fellow Vermonter, Senator Welch, and from House Transportation Chairman Sam Graves, who has been very supportive throughout this process.

I would not be here today if it wasn't for the love and support of my family, especially my wife, Mary, who's been patient and amazingly supportive throughout this process.

To begin, I want to acknowledge Secretary Buttigieg and Deputy Secretary Trottenberg for the exceptional leadership they have shown in ensuring the FAA remains focused on its critical mission to provide the safest and most efficient aerospace system in the world.

Throughout my career, I have believed in this mission. Not only during my previous tenure at the FAA, but as an airline executive, and now as I focus on emerging technologies in our airspace. If confirmed, I will apply my 32 years of aviation experience to lead the 44,000 dedicated professionals at the FAA, who work in every U.S. state and territory, and across the globe, to meet this mission.

I began my aviation career as an attorney for Trans World Airlines, then rose through the ranks of United Airlines from senior counsel in the regulatory group, to senior vice president of alliances, international and regulatory affairs. Most recently, I have worked with emerging aviation technologies, such as small unmanned systems and electric propulsion.

However, the key experience that qualifies me for this position, and that will allow me to make an immediate impact at the FAA, is my three-year tenure there as Deputy Administrator. During this time, I gained significant technical knowledge of the complex systems that make up our national airspace, such as ADS-B.

While at the FAA, I also earned my private pilot's certificate to better understand the national airspace from the perspective of a user of that system.

If confirmed, my priority will be the safety of the flying public. They have put their trust in the FAA to keep aviation the safest way to travel, and the world has looked to us for decades as the gold standard. To maintain that trust and that title, I would immediately focus on three things as administrator:

First, I will work to not just maintain the safety record we have collectively achieved, but build upon it.

The two Boeing MAX crashes remind us that we must be ever vigilant. The FAA must finish implementing the remaining provisions of the certification reform legislation passed by Congress, thanks to this committee's leadership. These changes, along with other actions the FAA has taken, will ensure that gaps in the certification process are fully closed, and that we are able to catch risks even when they are not disclosed.

We simply cannot become complacent, and we must continuously improve. In March, the FAA announced a new goal to end serious close calls. This is critical. We will not achieve this overnight, but it is urgent work that we must continue.

Second, we need to build the aviation system of the future. This requires the FAA to be agile and creative, and for all of us to make ongoing investments.

When I was at the FAA just a few years ago, drones were new, commercial space launches were rare and flying taxis were still only in cartoons. All of this has changed, and it requires that the agency be forward looking, adapt quickly, and execute a plan for the future.

Third, none of this can be achieved without making the FAA a place of choice where aviators want to build their careers.

We must have a pipeline of dedicated public servants to achieve our mission. Nowhere is this clearer than the ongoing work to catchup on air traffic controller training. The shortage has been years in the making, but you have my commitment to reduce this backlog.

The FAA faces big challenges, and it will take innovators and dreamers, who bring ideas from every part of our country, to solve them. Aviation has opened doors of opportunity to so many, including me. We must make sure it continues to do so for citizens in every corner of the country, no matter their background.

I am honored by the trust the President has placed in me with this nomination. If confirmed, I will remain committed to the FAA's mission and pledge to work with you and the Committee.

Thank you for considering my nomination today. I am pleased to answer any questions you have.