

U.S. Senator Michael Bennet
Nomination Hearing for Phil Washington to be Administrator of the Federal
Aviation Administration
U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

March 1, 2023

Introduction Remarks:

[VIDEO](#)

BENNET: Thank you, Chair Cantwell for having me, and Ranking Member Cruz for the opportunity to introduce Phil Washington. It's a privilege to be here with my colleague, John Hickenlooper.

Phil's obviously President Biden's nominee to lead the Federal Aviation Administration. John Hickenlooper and I have known Phil for almost 20 years, going back to the days when John was Mayor of Denver, and he graciously endured me as his Chief of Staff. We both worked closely together with Phil, who had recently joined Colorado's Regional Transportation District after an exceptional career that took him from his youth in a housing project on the Southside of Chicago to the rank of Command Sergeant after 24 years in the U.S. Army.

I believe Phil's son, Phil Washington Jr., is with us this morning. Thank him for making the trip to Washington. Thanks for sharing your dad with us so he can continue to serve Colorado and the country.

Senator Hickenlooper has already offered an excellent overview of Phil's experience in Colorado's Regional Transportation District, LA County's Transportation Authority, and Denver's International Airport. So instead of taking you through that again, I want to share my observations about Phil's specific qualifications to lead the FAA at this critical juncture for the agency.

As this Committee appreciates more than most, the FAA has long set the global standard for airline safety. But recent incidents have shaken the public's confidence and undermined our global leadership.

This is the perfect time for a leader like Phil Washington, who would bring a proven record for delivering results. He turned around our RTD. He turned around transit in LA County. He's driving overdue change at DIA and I have no doubt he would do the same at the FAA.

I understand some members of this Committee have argued Phil lacks direct experience in aviation. We just heard that argument. I'm surprised by that because as we've heard, he currently is running the third busiest airport on planet earth. He literally

spends every day liaising with 25 airlines, managing over 30,000 employees, and navigating local, state, and federal aviation policy. He's spearheading the most ambitious overhaul of that third busiest airport at DIA since Colorado first built the airport almost 30 years ago.

I point out to the chairwoman that we're very proud that DIA is the youngest airport in America, but it's 30 years old, we need to build airports in this country again. Phil could help us with that too, easily leading an \$800 million renovation to the Main Hall, building 39 New gates, designing seven the runway, and revamping the airport's entire baggage system, all with the traveling public continuing to make its way through the airport.

Phil was also instrumental in developing Vision 100, a strategic plan for DIA to prepare the airport to process 100 million passengers a year through an expanded workforce infrastructure and air service network.

So despite suggestions to the contrary, Phil's experience is comparable to previous FAA nominees like Jane Garvey and Michael Huerta whom John mentioned, both of whom the Senate confirmed with a strong bipartisan support.

Instead of focusing on Phil's obvious qualifications, there's been an attempt in recent months to distract from his record and frankly, impugn his character. And I won't dignify that effort in my remarks, I will just say that the past 20 years have left me only with the highest regard for Phil's integrity and leadership. That's what the people of Denver believe about Phil and the people of Colorado do as well.

And you don't have to take my word for it. The Mayor of Denver, Michael Hancock, is at the hearing. Before the Mayor asked Phil to lead DIA, he conducted a thorough background check. Phil not only cleared that review, the Denver City Council confirmed him unanimously. Senator, they don't agree on anything, by the way, but they agreed on Phil. Senator Hickenlooper and I can tell you from experience that you don't get a lot of unanimous votes, as I said, from the City Council, and I see no reason why Phil's historic nomination shouldn't receive a unanimous vote from this Committee. Any fair assessment of his career and of his character would see a nominee with integrity, drive, and a record of results at every institution he's led. You would make an outstanding administrator for the FAA and I wholeheartedly endorse his nomination.