

Response to Written Questions Submitted by Honorable Dan Sullivan to Jennifer Homendy

Question 1. Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), or drones, continue to be used for variety of purposes in Alaska and across the country, including for pipeline safety, innovation within the oil and gas sector, and numerous other recreational and commercial activities. Because of the enormous role aviation plays in Alaska, particularly with our diverse geography and enormous airspace, we have long led the way in developing innovative measures and partnerships to ensure our aviation systems are safe, reliable and accessible for all users. Last week, the Department of Transportation named the University of Alaska, Fairbanks as one of 10 sites nationwide selected for the highly competitive FAA UAS Integration Pilot Program. This is a positive step to ensuring the development and advancement of the rules governing UAS are made with the input, real-world applications and knowledge of Alaskan stakeholders.

In your new role, will you ensure the agency shares what it has learned to date from investigations of previous accidents, so that our test sites are aware of NTSB recommendations on how in regards to safety challenges affiliated with these rapidly changing technologies?

Response. Yes, if confirmed, I will ensure that the NTSB shares with Alaska's test sites what it has learned to date from completed investigations of accidents or incidents involving UAS.

Question 2. Can you tell me what the agency does to ensure employees have access to needed expertise that exists in private industry to investigate in a field with rapidly changing technologies?

Response. Transportation technologies continue to advance and it is critical that the NTSB, like all Federal agencies, remain aligned with changing trends. In the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (P.L. 115-141), Congress provided the NTSB with \$4.4 million for Emerging Transportation Technologies, which will largely be used for additional training for NTSB staff and to support continued outreach with other investigative agencies and industry stakeholders regarding the latest innovations. An additional \$3.6 million is included in the NTSB's Fiscal Year 2019 Budget Request sent to Congress on February 12, 2018.

Response to Written Questions submitted by Honorable Dean Heller to Jennifer Homendy

Question. Under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, the federal government is looking at shipping 9,495 rail casks in 2,800 trains and 2,650 trucks hauling one cask each to Yucca Mountain over 50 years. These shipments would use 22,000 miles of railways and 7,000 miles of highways and cross over 44 states. Under previous questioning from me at this Committee, Federal Railroad Administrator Ronald Batory and Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administrator Howard Elliott confirmed that a transportation accident with an ensuing radiological release was possible.

Ms. Homendy, you testified that even if all of the National Transportation Safety Board-recommended safety measures were to be implemented, the risk of transporting nuclear waste would not be eliminated.

Given your assessment that we cannot engineer out 100% of the risk and given the significant number of proposed shipments, the sheer distance to be traveled, and the 50-year duration of these shipments, do you agree with Mr. Batory and Mr. Elliott that there is a real risk of at least one transportation accident with an ensuing radiological release occurring?

Response. According to the Association of American Railroads, there has never been a release as a result of a rail shipment of spent nuclear fuel (SNF). But, in 2016, there were just eight shipments of SNF (defense-related) out of about 2.2 million rail shipments of hazardous materials. As you noted, under the Nuclear Waste Policy Act, shipments would substantially increase.

The Federal Railroad Administration reports in its “Safety Compliance Oversight Plan for Transportation of High-Level Radioactive Waste and Spent Nuclear Fuel” that 75 to 90 percent of SNF and high-level radioactive waste (HLRW) will be transported by rail under the proposal. An increase in rail traffic of SNF and HLRW could increase the risk of an accident with an ensuing radiological release. Even with the strongest safety measures in place, it would be impossible to say with 100 percent certainty that an accident could never occur.