



Chairman Mario Diaz-Balart

*Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban
Development, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

**Department of Transportation – FY 2018 Budget Hearing
Secretary Elaine Chao
June 15, 2017
Opening Statement As Prepared**

This morning we welcome Secretary Elaine Chao to testify on the Fiscal Year 2018 budget for the Department of Transportation.

Secretary Chao comes to this position with an impressive record of public service, having served as Chair of the Federal Maritime Commission, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Transportation, Director of the Peace Corps, and Secretary of the Department of Labor -- not to mention a number of leadership positions in the private and non-profit sectors.

You have led large and complex organizations, and we are fortunate to have someone of your experience and expertise leading DOT as we face exciting and challenging times ahead. Thank you for your service to our nation.

I look forward to working with you to maintain and improve the safety of our transportation systems – all the while ensuring that our infrastructure investments lead to economic growth and improve the day to day lives of the American people.

The budget request for the Department of Transportation is \$16.3 billion in discretionary budget authority, and a total of \$75 billion in total resources, including obligation limitations for surface transportation and aviation programs.

Safety is this Committee's top priority for DOT. I am pleased that the budget request places a priority on safety programs, funding several programs consistent with the FAST Act and continuing many of the safety priorities funded in the FY 2017 appropriations bill.

In addition to focusing on the safety of our transportation networks, we must also ensure that we grow our economy through fiscally responsible transportation investments. In doing so, we must make sure we don't leave rural America and economically distressed regions behind.

As we make the tough decisions that face us in FY 2018 and beyond, I want to work with you to make sure we continue air service to small towns and remote communities. And I want to make sure we address the passenger rail needs of our rural communities.

I also want to take a careful look at transit as an important component of our transportation network. We can, and must, make tough choices on Federal spending. But I have concerns about the Administration's proposal to terminate the Department's work with local governments on several dozen transit projects that are in the planning and design stage.

I look forward to a spirited discussion about the Administration's proposal to transfer air traffic control operations and facilities to a corporate, non-governmental monopoly.

I have not been shy in saying that I believe we should maintain air traffic control as a system that is accountable to the public. And I don't see any other way to achieve this than to continue our Congressional oversight role.

I believe preserving the public's voice is the only way to maintain our airspace as a National asset and protect access for all users – commercial aviation, general aviation, and new entrants such as drone and commercial space operators.

And we must, to the maximum extent possible, protect the rights of the travelling public.

Our airspace is the most complex in the world, with an unmatched safety record. We can work together to build on that safety record and open the airspace to more and more users, some of which are beyond our current imagination. I look forward to discussing this issue with you today, and in the weeks and months ahead.

Secretary Chao, I appreciate the attention you and the President gave to infrastructure last week. Improving our Nation's infrastructure is an area where we can find common ground and make real improvements to the daily lives of the American people.

I look forward to working with you and my colleagues to make smart investments, cut red tape, and protect the taxpayer.

Thank you again for your appearance before us today.

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