



Opening Statement of Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Chairman Brian Babin

Full Committee Hearing

Advanced Air Mobility: The Future of Unmanned Aircraft Systems and Beyond

March 23, 2023

Today's hearing will examine research and development of advanced air mobility, also known as AAM, and unmanned aircraft systems, also known as UAS and commonly called "drones." The hearing will also provide an overview of how advanced R&D can enable supply chain security and safe integration of UAS into the National Airspace System.

There are two challenges for the deployment of next-generation autonomous systems across the country: the need for more research and development, and an improved regulatory framework.

The Science Committee has jurisdiction over federal research and development, so that will be the focus of our discussion today.

Additionally, the hearing will also serve as a legislative hearing for the National Drone and Advance Air Mobility Initiative Act, a bill to improve research, development, deployment, and manufacturing of UAS in the United States.

As the name suggests, UAS are complex systems made up of not only the aircraft, but also the supporting ground, air, and communications infrastructure.

Advanced air mobility, or AAM, integrates new technologies to enable urban and inter-city movement of people and cargo delivery. It can be manned or unmanned.

Commercial use of UAS and AAM have the potential to carry out a wide range of missions across a broad range of sectors, including agriculture, weather monitoring, critical infrastructure, transportation, public safety, and disaster relief, which can greatly benefit our society.

UAS experimentation and testing at high schools and universities might also lead to technology breakthroughs as well as inspire students to enter STEM fields.

However, due to the delays in integrating UAS into the National Airspace System, these technologies are unable to reach their maximum potential. As a result, U.S. companies are going overseas to conduct UAS R&D, which directly impacts our national security and economic competitiveness.

Our goal today is to better understand the research underway to overcome these barriers and how we can streamline UAS and AAM integration.

We can't afford to delay much longer. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has made it clear that it wants to dominate the globe in key technology areas, and drones are certainly one of them.

One CCP-supported Chinese drone company has a near-monopoly of the drone market, providing 90 percent of the drones used for public safety operations in the U.S.

That means that our police, first responders, and even border agents are using hardware and software from a company tied to the CCP, which should have everyone here concerned.

Relying on these drones from China is putting our privacy and security at risk. And we're also losing out on the economic benefits of having American businesses compete in this rapidly growing industry.

UAS also hold great potential for assisting civil agencies. NASA and NOAA use UAS to conduct research and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) use UAS to monitor the border and track smugglers, cartels, and those who have crossed the border illegally.

In addition to the benefits, it is critical that we carry out R&D to better understand how to mitigate the public safety challenges posed by UAS.

As the United States faces growing competition from the CCP and other adversaries, it's never been more important to maximize our federal R&D resources.

The federal government has a long tradition of investing in fundamental research, and having the ability to understand, control and manufacture materials will be essential to our success in domestically producing drones.

I want to thank all of our witnesses for taking the time to participate in today's important hearing. Your expertise will be invaluable as we continue to look at the future of unmanned aircraft systems, advanced air mobility, and the competitiveness of the United States.

Thank you, I yield back.