COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE SPACE AND TECHNOLOGY

Opening Statement of Chairman Frank Lucas

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

March 23, 2023

Good morning, and thank you for being here today for this important discussion about emerging air mobility technologies.

Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) and Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) are going to be a significant area of focus for this Committee this year because of the tremendous potential these technologies hold.

Advanced Air Mobility is quite literally transforming how we transport people and goods in underserved areas of the U.S.

For instance, Electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing (eVTOL) vehicles can serve urban areas with limited spaces to land aircraft. They can transport goods around town or serve passengers on inter-city trips.

Electric Short Take-Off and Landing (eSTOL) can use short runways to quickly launch and transport people and cargo between areas not served by existing airports.

And Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), often called drones, can deliver packages, provide photos and videos for public safety, monitor infrastructure, and increase crop yield in agriculture.

The demand for UAS is growing exponentially. In 2018, the drone services market was worth less than $5 billion. But it's predicted to grow to more than $63 billion by 2025. The market for Advanced Air Mobility is expected to increase to $115 billion by 2035, creating more than 280,000 new jobs.

It is an economic imperative that we expand this industry in the United States so we can benefit from future market growth.

That's the idea behind the National Drone and Advance Air Mobility Initiative Act, a bill I introduced last Congress and plan to reintroduce.

This legislation will help advance these technologies by establishing a National Drone and Advanced Air Mobility Initiative to coordinate UAS activities.

In addition to authorizing R&D at a range of federal agencies, it will authorize a network of research institutes to coordinate cross-cutting R&D.

This bill will expand the workforce needed to build out the UAS industry, as well as address risks to UAS supply chains.

Finally, it will establish a counter-UAS center of excellence to support the work necessary to improve our abilities to respond to threats from adversaries using UAS.

Today's hearing will help guide the development of our legislation and I look forward to working with Ranking Member Lofgren on that process.

We have already seen great strides in R&D for UAS and AAM in my home state of Oklahoma. Oklahoma is ranked first in State readiness for drone commerce for a number of reasons.

Dr. Jamey Jacob – one of our witnesses today- leads a team at Oklahoma State University, the University of Oklahoma, and the University of Tulsa that is driving innovative research to advance next-generation UAS and AAM technologies.

Tribal Nations are leveraging their unique assets to advance research for safe and responsible drone operations. And Oklahoma is partnering with neighboring states to position the region as a hub for AAM.

But there is still more critical R&D that must be done for the United States to lead in next-generation drones and AAM technologies.

I look forward to our witnesses' testimony on how we can best support that R&D.

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.