



## **Opening Statement of Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Chairman Brian Babin**

Space & Aeronautics Subcommittee Hearing  
*The Federal Aviation Administration's Flight Plan: Examining the Agency's Research and  
Development Programs and Future Plans*

March 9, 2023

---

Good morning, and welcome to the Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee hearing to review the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) portfolio of research and development (R&D) programs and examine priorities and challenges.

I want to welcome the new members of our subcommittee this Congress. And I'd like to extend a special welcome to our new ranking member, Congressman Sorensen. I look forward to working with you this Congress.

Thank you to our panel of witnesses for taking the time to share their expertise with us this morning.

I'm eager to hear your testimony, which will inform the committee as we draft legislation authorizing FAA's research and development activities, examine research priorities, and support investments that are balanced between strategic and mission-oriented projects.

The Science Committee has a long history of work on FAA's research and development activities. The most recent FAA Authorization, signed into law in 2018, included the Flight R&D Act authored by this committee. Among the notable provisions included was the creation of a new position within FAA to oversee the agency's research and development activities, as well as language directing that an increased share of funding must go toward safety research.

Today's hearing is an opportunity for Members to learn about the implementation of these provisions as well as policy considerations that we should consider as the current FAA Authorization expires in September.

The aviation industry is a crucial component of our economy and national security. It is the backbone of global trade, connecting people, goods, and ideas across borders. The FAA supports this industry by setting aviation standards, improving safety, increasing efficiency, and developing new technologies.

In short, the FAA's research and development work drives progress in the aviation industry, which in turn makes America more globally competitive.

America has long been the global leader in aviation standards and technology. That leadership is being challenged, however. The largest growth sector in this industry is not here in the U.S., but in Asia.

If we are going to maintain our competitive advantage, we need to invest in the growth of new technologies, strategically prioritize our funding to ensure safety, and provide a competitive environment for industry.

We must also stay at the cutting-edge of technological development.

One area where R&D support is especially important is Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) and unmanned aircraft systems (UAS). The rise of UAS, commonly known as drones, can be transformative in how we approach public safety, emergency response, and even rural infrastructure. But the development and integration of AAM into the national airspace system poses significant technical, operational, and regulatory challenges. We must address these if we're going to stay competitive in the growing drone industry.

Unfortunately, we don't have endless resources to support the FAA. As lawmakers, we need to make strategic decisions about our research and development priorities. We also need to provide oversight to hold the agency accountable for its performance and ensure that its programs are aligned with the needs of the aviation industry and the American people. Finally, we need to ensure there is coordination between public and private sector efforts so that we can minimize duplication that may crowd-out private sector investment – which has historically been critical to the U.S. aviation sector's success.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how we can strategically address these challenges. I hope to learn more about the status of FAA's research and development programs, how FAA is identifying research priorities, and how we in Congress should proceed as we consider the next FAA reauthorization bill.

I now recognize the Ranking Member for his opening statement.