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House of Representatives
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TESTIMONY OF CONGRESSMAN DARREN SOTO
2023 Member Day Hearing
FOR THE TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Chairman Graves, Ranking Member Larsen, thank you for allowing me to testify before the Committee about my priorities for the Committee's work in 2023.

First, I appreciate the opportunity to present my priorities for the upcoming Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Bill. My district is home to the Orlando International Airport, which currently expects traffic to grow to 1.7 million passengers per week by the end of 2023. The timely reauthorization of this Bill is incredibly important given the role the FAA plays in ensuring a safe and efficient travel experience for these passengers. My priorities for the 2023 FAA Reauthorization include:

- Increased funding and flexibility of funds for the Airport Improvement Program (AIP). I support extending AIP eligibility to all activities allowed under the Passenger Fare Charge (PFC) program as outlined in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (*Pub.L. 117-58*), along with FAA requirements that mandate programmatic funding priorities take the new eligibility into account. This will ensure airports have maximum flexibility to improve infrastructure and capacity. In addition, I support increasing the authorized funding levels for AIP to a minimum of \$4 billion annually.
- Addressing the aviation industry workforce shortage. I support steps to address the aviation workforce shortage, such as: 1) increasing federal student loan aid for pilot training, 2) extending and increasing funding for Aviation Workforce Development Grants to \$10 million annually, and; 3) continued support for programs such as the FAA's Minority Serving Institutions Intern Program (MSI), which promotes diversity in the aviation workforce. Additionally, I support efforts to provide aviation student housing on airport property. Currently, the FAA views student housing on airports as non-compatible land use, however, additional support for students is necessary given the current shortage of pilots and mechanics. This initiative would support training efforts for students, especially students from historically underrepresented communities, by lowering expenses of housing and travel costs to and from the airport and developing an affordable campus

atmosphere.

- Airspace integration for space launch and reentry. I support requirements for the FAA to prioritize the development and deployment of technologies to improve the visibility of space launch and reentry operations within FAA computer systems and minimize operational workload to air traffic controllers associated with routing traffic during spaceflight launch and reentry operations. Additionally, I support the authorization of no less than \$10 million for fiscal years 2024 through 2028 to expedite the development, acquisition, and deployment of technologies or capabilities to aid in space launch and reentry integration. These efforts will help minimize launch delays and help relieve burden from both airlines and commercial space flight providers.
- Improving customer experience for the hearing impaired. I support the renewal of an Advisory Committee on issues related to the air travel needs of passengers with disabilities, originally established in SEC. 439 of the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Bill. In addition, I support a requirement for the committee to submit in its annual report to Congress a list of policy recommendations for how Congress, the Department of Transportation, and airlines can collaborate to accelerate the adoption of in-flight entertainment systems capable of closed captions to improve the experience of passengers who are hearing impaired.
- Improving customer experience with regard to the use of airline vouchers. I support a requirement for airlines to print clear and conspicuous blackout and expiration dates on vouchers issued to customers for redemption of flights or other services.
- Funding for the Federal Contract Air Traffic Control Tower program. I support the authorization of \$16 million for this program, as it will improve efficiency for increased air traffic levels and serve as a critical safety measure to maintain separation of aircrafts.
- Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting (ARFF) Truck program. I support the authorization of \$1 million for this program, as it will protect against economic losses from fire, create additional jobs, and serve as a critical asset to regional economies and transportation systems.
- Taxiway Delta Extension program. I support the authorization of \$12 million for this program to improve aging infrastructure and expand airport operations to meet today's required aviation growth.
- Promoting safety regarding Unmanned Ariel Systems (UAS). I support requirements for the FAA to work with airports, aviation stakeholders, and TSA to ensure (1) new entrants

are safely integrated into the National Airspace System, and (2) airports are protected from unsafe UAS activities.

- Transitional plan for PFAS remediation. I support FAA collaboration with industry stakeholders to develop a national transition plan that would assist airports in moving to fluorine-free firefighting foams. Specifically, I support the allocation of federal funds for an acquisition program for the new foam, a disposal program for the old foam, and PFAS remediation at airports. In addition, I support liability protection to airports around previous use of PFAS, including CERCLA liability protection.

I would also like to ask the Committee to prioritize continued oversight of the following projects authorized through the 2022 Water Resource Development Act:

- The Lake Runnymede, Florida project for ecosystem restoration.
- The Lake Tohopekaliga, Florida Project for ecosystem restoration and flood risk management.
- The Shingle Creek and Kissimmee River project for ecosystem restoration and flood risk management.
- The \$10 million authorization for wastewater infrastructure, including stormwater management, in Polk County, Florida.
- The \$50 million authorization for water and wastewater infrastructure, including water reclamation and water supply, in Orange County, Florida.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Larsen, I look forward to working with you to advance these priorities and I welcome any questions you may have. Thank you and I yield back.