JetZero CEO, Tom O'Leary, Testimony

Outproducing the CCP: Restoring American Manufacturing

November 20, 2026, Canon House Office Building

Chairman Moolenaar, Ranking Member Khanna, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the invitation. I am Tom O'Leary, co-founder and CEO of JetZero, an American aircraft company headquartered in Long Beach, California, and building its factory in Greensboro, North Carolina. We are building the world's first blended wing body airplane: the Z4, a dual-use aircraft: a passenger jet for about 250 people that also has military uses, including as an aerial refueling and airlift for the U.S. military and her allies. By blending the wings with the body, the plane burns up to 50 percent less fuel than a conventional jet of similar size and reshapes the passenger experience.

American researchers conceived it as a large airplane in the 1990s; NASA laboratories proved the structures, material and flight control laws; and now an American company is building it.

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My argument is simple. Aerospace is one of the last advanced industries where America still leads China, and that lead will not hold on its own. The necessary conditions for capitalism to succeed exist, but we must recognize and address how China is changing the rules of the game.

Your report, *Rigging the Game*, shows what happens when we treat an industry as permanent. Semiconductors, shipbuilding, and machine tools were American strengths. Aerospace still is: in 2025 we ran a $131 billion trade surplus in aircraft, spacecraft, and parts. And the factories, engineers, and suppliers that build airliners also build military variants. Aerospace is a dual-use industry.

China plays a long game. Your report estimates forty-nine billion dollars in subsidies and financing for COMAC through 2020. Results so far are mixed: COMAC, China's state-owned airliner maker, delivered 15 C919s last year against a target of 75, and still relies on Western engines. But the right conclusion is not that China is failing. It is that China is learning. No one in 2001 Detroit thought China would own the global car market. Yet here we are today.

The question for this Committee is what China does with the experience it is gaining, and what that means for our national security and technological leadership one to two decades from now.

China has spent more than fifteen years evaluating blended wing configurations and has flownsubscale blended wing body demonstrators since 2017. We assess that a blended wing body tanker is a likely early priority for the PLA Air Force. Whoever industrializes this configuration first wins the commercial market and gains a distinct capability contributing to an air superiority advantage

Here is what we in JetZero are doing to ensure America leads. In June, we broke ground on an eight-million-square-foot assembly campus in Greensboro: a $4.7 billion investment that will create 14,500 jobs. Our full-scale demonstrator, built with Northrop Grumman's Scaled Composites, flies next year. It exists because the Air Force awarded us $235 million in 2023 as a public private partnership to build and fly it. In total, JetZero has raised and secured commitments of more than $1.0 billion, including investment, incentives and commercial commitments.

Last month, the Hudson Institute found that a blended wing body tanker could carry far more fuel much farther than today's fleet. That matters because China is watching airfields in the Middle East come under attack, and it faces the same tyranny of distance across the Pacific. China can threaten our forward airfields today. The current tanker fleet cannot deliver quantity at range. The blended wing body can. Who will own that advantage first, us or China?

Here is the lesson. JetZero got this far by stitching together a federal contract, private capital, airline commitments, and a supportive state in North Carolina. That is the resilience of one startup, not a national strategy, and it has not been easy. You cannot expect American industry to deliver large scale new solutions, better than our adversaries and faster to market without a coordinated federal strategy. Congress sets the conditions for capitalism to succeed – and what the nation needs is a federal strategy to protect, promote and help fund advanced manufacturing. This will benefit the U.S. economy, our national defense, and our leadership in aviation.

China does not stitch deals together. It plans and sets a whole policy playbook in motion.

Previous decades saw too much technology, invented and developed here in the United States, cross the Pacific where it’s produced at scale – in exchange for market access. We

all need to bear the responsibility of making decisions that build this country's manufacturing base and resilient supply chain to support U.S. industry.

I offer three recommendations. First, name next generation aerospace technology as a strategic aim in the industrial strategy your report calls for and support it as such with coordinated interagency planning and federal loan programs, as needed. Second, bridge demonstrators to production with prototype commitments, so a successful prototype can compete to be a fleet. Third, resource the FAA and support certification reform to certify new configurations on a predictable timeline, because certification is now a geopolitical tool. My written statement offers further steps on supply chains and research security.