



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON **SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY**

Opening Statement

Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA)

The Federal Aviation Administration's Flight Plan: Examining the Agency's Research and Development Programs and Future Plans

March 9, 2023

Good morning, and thank you, Chairman Babin for holding this hearing today. I want to extend a warm welcome to our witnesses. We appreciate your expertise on this important topic of FAA's research and development programs. I also want to join Ranking Member Sorensen in welcoming our new and returning Democratic Members of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics. I think you'll find this to be a very exciting and active Subcommittee.

Aviation is critical to this country's economy and global leadership, and the Science Committee has an important role to play in reauthorizing the R&D activities of the Federal Aviation Administration. I look forward to working with our Republican Majority to craft a bipartisan FAA R&D title, and I appreciate this chance to review the opportunities and challenges for FAA's R&D portfolio.

Aviation can be—and needs to be—safe for all stakeholders, including crew and passengers, airport workers, and communities surrounding airports. Emerging technologies can enable a cleaner, safer, more efficient aviation system. I see many opportunities for the future of our aviation sector, and it is Congress' role to ensure that FAA is prepared to meet the nation's needs. That starts with a robust foundation of research and development. FAA must have a clear, coherent strategy to ensure that its R&D is focused on solving pressing problems and transferred effectively to operations within the nation's air transportation system. Further, FAA needs to be able to respond effectively to emerging issues and proactively prepare to meet the challenges we know are coming.

However, some of FAA's challenges are not new, and I'm concerned about the lack of progress in addressing them. To take just one example—but one with dire consequences for the people in my own district—lead in aviation fuel. Leaded fuels are the primary fuel for piston-engine aircraft—typically smaller aircraft used for purposes ranging from personal recreational and hobby flying, to flight schools, crop-dusting, and search-and-rescue efforts—which comprise the General Aviation sector. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—the CDC—has concluded that there is no known safe level of lead in the blood. What that means is residents near General Aviation airports live with lead exposure in the air and the ground every day, as evidenced by the blood levels of children in the neighborhood surrounding Reid-Hillview Airport in eastern San Jose, in my district. But we should not be having this conversation.

Members of this Subcommittee raised concerns about leaded avgas at a hearing on FAA R&D in 2011, over a decade ago. The FAA has been investing in research to find an alternative to leaded avgas since at least 2013. What has been accomplished?

Last year, the FAA announced a new government-industry partnership, the Eliminate Aviation Gasoline Lead Emissions (EAGLE) initiative, of which R&D is one “pillar.” I am encouraged by the Biden administration’s commitment, but we need to see results, and we need to see them faster than the EAGLE initiative’s 2030 stated goal. I will not sit idly by while the children of San Jose and communities around the country are exposed to dire health hazards.

I look forward to hearing from our expert witnesses on concrete actions that can be taken now to get us to a solution. While this is just one of many important research activities across the FAA R&D portfolio, it is one that must be a priority and we need to get it right. As the authorizing Committee, we need to know what is needed to set the civil aviation R&D enterprise up for success, and a successful R&D enterprise is one that figures out how to get lead out of airplanes so that our children and most vulnerable communities are safe.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.