

STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

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Committee Member

“Unmanned Aircraft Systems Research and Development”

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Good Morning, and welcome to our distinguished panel of witnesses. Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing on Unmanned Aircraft Systems Research and Development.

On March 3, 1915, Congress established the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics, or NACA, “to separate the real from the imagined and make known the overlooked and unexpected” in the quest for flight. In 1958, the NACA's staff, research facilities and know-how were transitioned to the new NASA. So it is fitting, this year being the 100th anniversary of NACA, that the first aerospace related hearing by the Committee focuses on aeronautics.

Among the most dramatic events in aviation in the past ten years has been the growth of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS). As most of my colleagues on the Committee know, I am a strong supporter of technology development and the innovation that it breeds. That is why I am so excited to see the explosive growth in the UAS industry and the potential it has to generate good jobs.

Initially limited to military applications and specialized federal civil uses such as border patrol, breakthroughs in miniaturization and other technological advances have resulted in broader UAS use and availability. UAS aircraft the size of a bird have prompted game-changing and widely publicized proposals, such as using UAS to support doorstep delivery of packages and meals.

But my colleagues also know that I am also a staunch advocate for safety. I was alarmed to read during the holidays that a Washington Post investigation had uncovered internal emails that were reported to show that FAA safety inspector concerns, surfaced during their review of applications for UAS exemption of certain FAA standards, were dismissed by the agency’s senior management.

While I am aware that FAA Administrator Huerta has subsequently denied that FAA has been soft on its approval and enforcement policies, this report demonstrates the breadth of issues that need to be addressed in the Nation’s quest to safely integrate UAS in the National Airspace System.

I repeat: safely integrate UAS in the National Airspace System. That’s the challenge.

As you may recall, recognizing the significance of UAS and the need for a plan to facilitate the safe transition of UAS into the NAS, Congress had directed FAA in the “FAA Modernization and Reform Act reauthorization of 2012” to meet date-specific requirements and deadlines to achieve safe UAS integration.

Today, I hope to hear how well FAA is responding to Congress’s directive as well as determine whether the agency is taking advantage of the expertise of NASA and academic institutions. We also need to hear if FAA believes that those deadlines need to be adjusted in order to assure continued airspace safety.

I am cognizant of user criticism that FAA is not moving fast enough. That is why I hope to better understand what is required to secure a sound foundation for FAA’s UAS rulemaking and how research activities would be beneficial.