OPENING STATEMENT

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Subcommittee on Space
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

"Transforming America's Air Travel"
Space Subcommittee Hearing

June 11, 2015

Good morning, and welcome to our panel of witnesses. Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing to review the current state of U.S. civil aeronautics research and development.

But before I start, allow me to congratulate you on your Chairmanship of this Subcommittee. I know that we share many goals, such as maintaining a robust aerospace industry, ensuring that our modernization of the air traffic management is done safely, and sustaining the strength of NASA and our space program going forward.

I look forward to working with you this session on identifying the common ground that will enable us to develop policies and legislation reflective of this Committee's history of bipartisanship.

A century ago, our nation had the foresight to create the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA). NACA, which became NASA, led many breakthroughs in research and design that changed the course of aeronautics and aviation.

Today, U.S. civil aviation is a symbol of our nation's ingenuity and ability to design, develop, and manufacture products that are second to none. And, as many of my colleagues know, aviation is vital to our economy and mobility.

The numbers are staggering:

- Aviation contributes more than 1.5 trillion dollars annually to the U.S. economy.
- It supports 11.8 million direct and indirect jobs.
- And, it is one of the few U.S. industries that generates a positive trade balance—a positive contribution of 78.3 billion dollars in 2014.

However, it would be unwise for us to rest on our laurels.

Countries with both mature and less mature capabilities are investing in aviation and aeronautics for their strategic contributions to technology, education, workforce development, and global competitiveness. And, the market for air travel is changing, with growth in the Asia Pacific region projected to dramatically expand world air traffic by 2050. With such growth come challenges.

For example, in 2013, U.S. airlines burned 16 billion gallons of jet fuel, and the cost of delays to U.S. airlines during that same year was 8.1 billion dollars. Increasing fuel efficiency, lessening delays, and minimizing negative environmental effects such as noise and carbon emissions are at the heart of strengthening our civil aviation system.

To that end, experts recognized fifteen years ago that the existing approach to managing air transportation was becoming operationally obsolete, and there was strong concern that the National Airspace System was approaching capacity.

Congress established the Next Generation Air Transportation System initiative—now known as NextGen—in its 2003 Vision 100 Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization to address these concerns. Over the past ten years, FAA's overall progress in developing NextGen has been slower than expected and the agency is now focused on implementing industry recommendations for near-term benefits.

Mr. Chairman, research and development--R&D--is providing the tools FAA will need to implement NextGen and improve the nation's aviation system so that it can respond to changing and expanding transportation needs.

Because of the lengthy gestation period needed to move from concept to deployment, industry has often been reluctant or unable to apply resources to high risk, fundamental aeronautics R&D – an investment which is the precursor to bringing new technologies and capabilities to market.

As a result, the federal government, primarily NASA and FAA, in partnership with industry and universities, plays a critical role in carrying out the R&D that enables advances in aviation.

So it concerns me, as I am sure it also concerns the Chairman, that Congress has yet to receive FAA's National Aviation Research Plan for 2015, and even for 2014, despite that fact that those plans are required to be submitted to Congress no later than the time of the President's annual budget submission.

Majority and Minority Members on this Committee need those FAA research plans to inform a reauthorization of FAA's research and development activities, to carry out oversight, and to assess the contributions that R&D makes to NextGen implementation.

For example, we need to know what kind of R&D activities are planned in cybersecurity, software assurance, human factors, and the certification of new technologies into the national airspace system—all critical areas for the future viability and safety of the National Airspace System.

So I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on the status of aviation R&D activities.

Because, Mr. Chairman, we need to work together to leverage the expertise and capabilities of Government, industry, and our universities. Our reliance on aviation is indisputable, but the challenges are steep if we are to maintain our global preeminence as well as the safety of the nation's aviation system. I am confident that properly funded research by NASA and FAA, in collaboration with industry and university partners, will enable us to achieve that goal.

Again, I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before our Subcommittee, and I look forward to your testimony.

Thank you, and I yield back.