

U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell
Following Passage of FAA Reauthorization

May 9, 2024

Sen. Cantwell Remarks

[\[AUDIO\]](#) [\[VIDEO\]](#)

Sen. Cantwell: Mr. President, I, too want to thank our colleagues for their hard work and their overwhelming support for the passage of this legislation.

This legislation will now hopefully go to our House colleagues on the consent calendar on Tuesday, and then very shortly after that to the president's desk.

This is historic bipartisan, bicameral legislation that not only invests in the Federal Aviation Administration, but the National Transportation Safety Board for the next five years. It is a record reauthorization to make sure that our safety regulators and our safety investigators make aviation the safety gold standard of the world.

This bill not only provides those authorizations, but I believe it helps give consumers the right kind of refunds for tickets after three hours of delay. It also puts the right safety people on the job, both for our air traffic controller system and for the FAA oversight of manufacturers.

By assuring that we have the safest aviation system in America, we are investing in our economy. Aviation contributes more than 5% to our GDP, \$1.9 trillion of economic activity, and it supports over 11 million jobs.

And if you ask me, the best way to get to the middle class is to get an aviation job, coming in as working-class, leaving as middle-class, as many manufacturing jobs in my state represent.

Our bill invests in the growth and well-being of that aviation workforce by making education investments in controllers, machinists, engineers, mechanics, pilots, flight attendants, baggage handlers, maintenance workers, and all those who are the backbone of the aviation economy.

I want to thank my colleague and partner in this, Senator Cruz, the Ranking Member of the Commerce Committee, for everything he's done to help pass this landmark legislation. It really was a bipartisan effort, and his efforts were instrumental in helping us get this legislation over the goal line.

I, too, want to thank many of our colleagues. He mentioned our two colleagues, the Chair of the Aviation Subcommittee Senator Duckworth and Ranking Member Moran, who both played a long and terrific advocacy role on expanding Essential Air Service and expanding the aviation workforce in our country.

I want to thank House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Graves and Ranking Member Larsen from my state for their leadership and dedication to making this a bicameral product and certainly making it bipartisan.

I also want to thank President Biden, Secretary Buttigieg, and Administrator Whitaker for their input as we moved through this legislation, and Senator Schumer for helping us get this bill to the last phase and over the goal line.

I also want to thank Senator Schumer, and Thune, Duckworth and Sinema for helping to negotiate key provisions of this bill related to pilot training. Nearly 3 million passengers fly in and out of our airports,

and making sure that we have the safest skies by the FAA doing its job is exactly why we needed this bill.

This bill implements new safety improvements in the aviation workforce, and codifies, as I mentioned, strong consumer protections like refunds. And it provides direction and resources to build a well-trained FAA workforce.

I want to thank the hard work of Senators Casey and Fetterman for including in this bill a provision that helps the FAA require airlines to have a secondary cockpit barrier to ensure that safety and security of our flight deck is there.

I want to thank Senator Klobuchar for advancing the aircraft runway traffic and landing technologies to prevent near misses, a conversation that has been very much part of this debate. The runway surface detection technology helps prevent close calls, and at only 43 airports, this bill was about expanding that as soon as possible because the NTSB said that was one of their number one recommendation.

Our bill will now require the further deployment of this technology, that will help prevent runway close calls at medium and large hub airports within the next few years.

Building on the **Aircraft Certification, Safety and Accountability Act**, we help provide for significant improvements in the design process so that the public is more informed. And we also directed the FAA to require training programs for those Organization Designation Authorization-- these are the ODAs that oversee the manufacturer. This includes strengthening those Unit Members' understandings of Safety Management Systems, something the Committee has held a lot of hearings on, and we know how important the Safety Management System is, according to our Expert Review Panel, to implement into law.

We authorized money for the next five years to boost the FAA's programs in safety, in factory inspections, and implemented a revised staffing model that really helps us with our air traffic controller system. This is so critical because right now we need more air traffic controllers, and we need them to be rested on the job.

This bill also includes an important safety provision from Senator Schatz, a helicopter safety bill, which brings standards to the commercial air tour systems in Hawaii.

And another major safeguard in safety is Senator Baldwin's provision with Senators Welch and Capito called the Global Aircraft Maintenance Safety Improvement Act, which helps oversee the safety inspections at our overseas airports. There are nearly 1,000 FAA certified maintenance and repair stations outside the United States, and they need to make sure that they have the proper oversight. This helps raise those safety standards worldwide.

Specifically, these technicians are now required to go through background checks and alcohol testing, and foreign repair stations are now subject to surprise inspections.

As I mentioned, the NTSB authorization is critical, and I want to thank my colleague, Senator Lujan, for his leadership on helping get this in the bill.

But also, one of the number one requirements why we wanted to get this done now with the NTSB is one of their key recommendations -- that's now in this statute -- is a 25-hour cockpit voice recording requirement that was also championed by Senators Blumenthal and Wyden.

This means when accidents happen, the NTSB will no longer be stifled by not getting the recording. They will have this recording and it will be required to be held for more than 25 hours.

I mentioned the workforce issues, which to my state is paramount. We need to continue to train and skill the best workers, and certainly that means air traffic controllers and aviation safety inspectors. We also, besides the increase for air traffic controllers to help deal with the staffing gap, are making sure that they have the best technology to work with as well.

And our colleagues, Senators Klobuchar, Duckworth, Moran, Thune, Peters, and Kelly helped us to recruit and retain the next generation of workforce.

So, I can't thank all my colleagues enough.

As mentioned and much discussed, Congress is setting, for the first time in statute, a refund standard for consumers to get a refund on non-refundable tickets after three hours of delay in the United States, and for six hours on an international flight.

These statutory rights are a big win for consumers. Passengers can just reject vouchers, alternative flights, and get a hassle-free refund.

I want to thank Senators Markey and Vance, and their provision of the bill, that says you cannot charge families extra dollars to sit next to each other. And the fact that they are championing, as Senators Markey and Schatz did, a new office at the Department of Transportation to make sure that airlines receive fines if they don't adhere to those provisions.

I also want to thank Senator Duckworth. I can't thank her enough, not just as the Chair of the Aviation Subcommittee, but also for her key leadership on so many aspects of this bill.

Not only is she a pilot, but she understands the needs of handicapped individuals and made sure that this legislation did a better job of training and skilling people in aviation workforce.

She's a true champion of the provisions in this bill dealing with wheelchair damage on flights and ensuring that passengers can safely evacuate a plane if necessary. We will be forever grateful for your leadership on many provisions of this legislation.

I want to just finally say, Senators Tester, Fischer, and Sullivan also worked on Essential Air Service and infrastructure financing improvements to make sure that our airports in rural communities continue to grow.

And Senators Peters, Baldwin, and Warnock for championing additional federal resources to help airports dispose of harmful chemicals and replace them for firefighting.

My colleague from Texas mentioned the great investments in next-generation technologies. Senators Hickenlooper, Rosen, Moran, Thune, and Wicker's advancing drone technology so that the United States can compete on a world stage, and providing next-generation research for companies like Universal Hydrogen and ZeroAvia who are making great products.

Also Senators Thune and Warner, our colleague from Virginia, for the creation of a regulatory path for drones to operate beyond the visual line of sight. That means, yes, we're going to move forward on how drones are going to start delivering home products to us, and I thank them for their hard work.

And Senator Rosen for her hard work on a grant program so that states and local governments using U.S. manufactured drones that are used in repairing and fixing critical infrastructure. And Senator Blackburn for her leadership that the FAA is not funneling any drone funding to American adversaries.

So you can see, Mr. President, you were part of this process. I thank you for your leadership, certainly in expanding capacity airports and getting more flights, but also for your great contributions, as I mentioned, in this legislation, on PFAS and many other things.

This was a committee process. It really was the way the Senate is supposed to work. It really was bipartisan and bicameral, and lots of people got their issues addressed. And they got their issues addressed because we had great staff who were willing to accommodate and work hard and implement those legislative ideas.

So I want to thank from our team, the Staff Director of the Commerce Committee, Lila Helms, our General Counsel, Melissa Porter, Rachel Devine, who literally came back about six or seven months ago to rejoin the Congress and literally we would not have this bill today if Rachel Devine had not rejoined the effort to work on the Hill, so I thank you, Rachel, for your hard work and dedication.

I want to thank Alex Simpson and Gigi Slais. Gigi has been at this so long, working under many people, and she knows every detail of this bill, and I so appreciate it. Doug Anderson, Lucia Mastrangelo, and our current Stumo Air Grant Fellow Amber Willitt, Tricia Enright, Ansley Lacitis, Jami Burgess, Maurie Mueller, Drew Hammill, and certainly want to thank Meghan Taira from Senator Schumer's office for helping us through many phases of this.

I also want to thank our former staffer, Ronce Almand, and detailee from the FAA airport office, Rob Hawkes, and our Samya Rose Stumo Fellow who is now over at the FAA, Rukia Hassam, for their hard work on this legislation.

I also want to thank Senator Cruz's team, because in all of these negotiations, it was critical to not only have a great understanding of FAA issues, but our colleagues and their priorities and continuing -

I'm not saying the Republicans came up with more amendments, but it certainly felt like that for a long time. It felt like y'all had a lot of pilots -- we had a pilot on our side, you had a few pilots on your side. So we processed a lot of amendments.

So I, too, want to thank Brad Grants, Nicole Christus, Simone Perez, Andrew Miller, Matt Swint, Hannah Hagan, and Liam McKenna for their work. And of course, Matt Weissman and Ben Rhodside from Senator Duckworth's team, and Lauren Bates from Senator Moran's.

This is a big moment for aviation. We've been through a lot. We have been through a COVID crisis and how to manage our aviation system while we were in that crisis. Coming out of the COVID crisis, when we may not have had everything correct in the order of how to keep flights and regain the capacity where we were at.

And we certainly know that we have had safety issues and concerns that we need to make a big investment. This legislation is that investment. In safety standards, in protecting consumers, and advancing a workforce and technology that will allow the United States to be the gold standard in aviation.

I thank my colleagues, Mr. President. I yield the floor.