COMMITTEE ON
SCIENCE, SPACE, & TECHNOLOGY
Lamar Smith, Chairman

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Statement of Chairman Lamar Smith (R-Texas)
Full Committee Markup:
FAA Leadership In Groundbreaking High-Tech Research and Development Act (H.R. 4489)

Chairman Smith: The "FAA Leadership in Groundbreaking High-Tech Research and Development Act," or FLIGHT R&D Act, will ensure America remains a world leader in aviation innovation.

We should make prioritized and strategic investments today that will enable America to continue to push the boundaries of aerospace science, maintain a safe and secure aviation transportation system, and allow for a healthy and growing aviation economy. I thank Representative Knight for introducing this important legislation.

The Science Committee has jurisdiction over all civil aviation research and development regardless of the funding account from which the research and development is appropriated.

The last time this Committee authorized the Federal Aviation Administration's research and development activities was in 2012. Since that time, significant changes have occurred, particularly the rapid development and creation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

It is critical that the United States efficiently and safely develop a system to integrate UAVs into our national airspace. If successfully integrated, UAVs have the potential to revolutionize transportation and logistics, generate new jobs, and position America as leader in UAV goods and services.

FAA research and development efforts should provide the scientific foundation for the certification of UAVs and associated technologies into the national airspace.

Since our last authorization, FAA's research and development activities also have received significant attention from the General Accountability Office (GAO) and the National Research Council (NRC).

Just last year, both the GAO and the NRC each released reports that addressed FAA research and development activities. The FLIGHT R&D Act reflects many of the findings and recommendations of those reports.

The Committee worked hard to conduct oversight and prepare for this reauthorization. In June last year, the Committee held a hearing on the current state of civil aeronautics research.

Our hearings found that there is a need to coordinate research across accounts. This bill addresses this issue. It aligns FAA management and organization to allow R&D to advance aviation safety, security, and economic competitiveness.

It directs the appointment of an Associate Administrator for Research and Development at the FAA to ensure that R&D is managed appropriately. And it strengthens FAA's Research and Development Advisory Committee.

A current issue before Congress is whether or not to transfer air traffic control responsibilities to a non-Federal entity. While not within the jurisdiction of our Committee, it does raise the question of how FAA research and development activities will be impacted.

The FLIGHT R&D Act wisely addresses this question. It directs the Administrator to develop a research and development plan in the event there is such a transfer.

The Act authorizes funding for FAA's Research, Engineering, and Development account through 2019, consistent with the FAA's National Aviation Research Plan for 2015, in a fiscally responsible manner.

The FLIGHT R&D Act enhances Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) R&D. It directs the FAA to coordinate UAS research to ensure efficient and effective use of taxpayer funding.

The bill instructs the FAA to report to Congress on its efforts to coordinate research and development between the public and private sector, among test sites, by the Center of Excellence, and with other government agencies such as NASA.

The FLIGHT R&D Act also strengthens the FAA's ability to defend against cybersecurity threats. It organizes and bolsters cybersecurity research and development at FAA.

Finally, the bill calls for the FAA to initiate or plan for emerging research and development fields. These include single-piloted commercial cargo aircraft safety, air traffic surveillance over oceans and other remote locations, advanced fuels, and certification of new technologies into the national airspace system.

I support the FLIGHT R&D Act and urge my colleagues to support this fiscally responsible commonsense bill as well. It will ensure that America remains at the forefront of civil aviation innovation.

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