

**U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell**  
**Floor Speech on Aviation Safety**

**February 20, 2025**

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**Sen. Cantwell:** Thank you, Mr. President. Starting last week, the Trump administration began firing hundreds of Federal Aviation Administration employees. Today, we had a hearing in the Commerce Committee to talk about what kind of a key [Deputy Secretary] we need at the [DOT], and we asked questions about this.

But what's perplexing is, while the American people were watching in horror as a Delta Airlines plane flipped over on the Toronto runway, President Trump was focused instead on purging dedicated FAA employees from the federal workforce, something that I believe makes us less safe in the skies. Among those fired were aeronautical information specialists, legal instrument examiners, telecommunication specialists -- all of whom played a key role in supporting the work of air traffic controllers.

In fact, there was a story today in Politico the headline is, 'Air traffic controllers cannot do their work without us.' That is a quote from the article. And inside the article, a statement, reading from the article, 'One of the people last week let go was an aeronautical information specialist, a member of a team outside Washington whose job it was to create maps and highways in the sky, the pre-planned routes that pilots control and controllers use to guide airplanes.'

So it's very perplexing that we've had these accidents and now we have an administration that wants to cut people at the FAA. This headline here refers to the fact that the last Trump administration actually blocked safety rules, and that is what today's Commerce hearing was about for [the] number two person at the Department of Transportation, the people that served in the first Trump administration, and why did they block these safety rules?

In fact, some of these safety rules, which would have required manufacturers to have better safety, were written and proposed by the FAA -- but when the Trump administration came in and then nine days after the first MAX crash -- somehow the rule that was set to move forward was pulled.

So now we're seeing an administration that is being, in my mind, thoughtless to the incidents that we have now seen in aviation, and saying it's okay to cut people at the FAA. I disagree.

The administration has said that it's no big deal because it's 1% of the workforce. Now, I know the objective is to give a \$4 trillion tax break to corporations and ultra wealthy people, but I don't understand how making the skies less safe helps you in that agenda. It doesn't. The individual lives and safety of the American people are worth way more.

These people that got fired are not just a bunch of junior hires, no -- one news report stated that, 'more than 130 of those eliminated held jobs directly or indirectly support the air traffic controllers. They support the facilities and the technologies they use to keep the planes and their passengers safe,' end quote.

So, you're going to tell me that a telecommunication specialist who supports the maintenance of key communication technology used by controllers -- is not important to aviation safety?

[...] Are you going to tell me that the legal instrument examiners who ensure that the pilots are medically fit to fly are not important to aviation safety? Are you going to tell me that the air traffic controllers, the same workers that originally were [not] exempted from the administration's hiring freeze, but then, [only] after the fatal collision at DCA put a spotlight on the issue, they literally came to a different answer.

Most astonishing of all, though, is that the administration has let go of aeronautical information specialists who evaluate and prepare navigational charts and helicopter routes used by both controllers and pilots.

Now we've just had this midair collision in the DCA area, and what was it about? A route that didn't seem to be a decision somebody had made to let these planes fly too close together? Made no sense.

How did that route get approved? Who at the FAA said it was a good idea to allow the Department of Defense to fly in the same air space as a plane landing on Runway 33 at DCA airport?

So, mapping helicopter routes in a busy air space, I think, is critically important -- and not somebody who should have been fired this week from a job.

Our aviation system is not a place where you can shortchange workers. This [SMS] rule proves it. This rule, which would have mandated that manufacturers of aviation implement a Safety Management System, constantly improving on analytical basis, is critical information about how to maintain safety. But it never got implemented.

So, I am concerned that an administration that in the previous Trump years thwarted the safety rule and now is firing people at the FAA after these crashes are going to continue to erode the aviation safety net.

Surprisingly, after the helicopter crash with the CRJ from American Airlines -- there was a lot of discussion about how and why a military helicopter would be in the same space as a CRJ regional jet trying to land in DCA from Kansas.

One of the questions asked was, why was there not this next generation technology that would allow [...] the helicopter to be detected. This included a DOD helicopter in the DCA collision incident.

The issue is that the controllers needed this information, but in an exemption done in the Trump administration, gave them an exemption to do this. And this week, we find out in a letter that they never, ever use ADS-B as a way to help us in our navigation safety.

Air traffic controllers themselves know that these firings are anti-safety.

Ken Greenwood, a constituent of mine in Washington state, who is a former Air Traffic Controller, wrote me on Sunday about how important these workers are, according to him, he said, quote, 'These technicians and engineers maintain every piece of equipment that keeps our

flying public safe, keeps radars and instrument landing to air traffic controllers on automation, and The FAA technicians undergo years of specialized training to maintain critical missions and systems and cannot be replaced quickly. In the 35 years since I began my controller career, we have never, never had a surplus of technicians or engineers.

To the contrary, it's a challenge to keep them in these jobs. Once our aviation system infrastructure is compromised, it takes decades to take it back, and money will not be saved and lives may be lost.' End quote.

I thank Mr. Greenwood for his service. I hope the administration is listening. I hope that you figure out now is not this time to shortchange aviation. Unfortunately, right now, we don't even have a confirmed FAA administrator.

They're critical to this job. We had a strong administrator, Mike Whitaker, who was confirmed 98 to 0 by this body. But that didn't matter to Elon Musk, who went after administrator Whitaker because he dared to fine SpaceX for not following the rules, and as a result, the FAA now does not have an administrator at one of its most critical points in decades.

All the firing of employees, and dangling resignations, and trying to get people to resign, to save money to give a tax break [of] \$4 trillion to corporations in the ultra-wealthy is not what we should be doing.

We should be working hard on aviation safety. We should not be rolling back safety rules. We should be enforcing safety rules and implementing them as fast as we can that says this body, this body knows that aviation safety is a priority. I thank the President, and I yield the floor.