



OPINION

## Trump can get the FAA to take off and fly in the right direction amid a Democrat-created DEI storm

FAA has been stagnating when it should quickly modernize technologies and procedures



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With President-elect Donald Trump in the captain's seat, the Federal Aviation Administration will move at warp-speed to regain the flying public's trust and make American skies great again. He will name a new administrator who has a sense of urgency; enough management acumen to unshackle worldclass aviation experts from DEI distractions; and enough political savvy to secure a badly needed multibillion-dollar budget for immediate modernization needs.

There's not a minute to spare.

As an airline transport pilot with more than 8,000 hours at the controls, as well as my time as Trump's ambassador to the European Union – where I was responsible for FAA's European headquarters – I am uniquely suited to understand what's going on.

And what's going on is stagnation when we need to be sprinting.



The FAA is in serious need of modernization, which would prevent major problems at airports. FILE: A Southwest Airlines Boeing 737-7H4 is pictured approaching San Diego International Airport for a landing on June 28, 2024, in San Diego, California (Photo by Kevin Carter/Getty Images)

The first time I took my mother flying, we were rolling down the runway, and she put her hands on the dashboard, leaned back and exclaimed, "Gordy, not so fast!" But to keep her safe, I couldn't slow down. The same goes for the next administration's FAA.

The congestion agitating the record number of fliers this Thanksgiving is the least of our problems if the [FAA doesn't quickly modernize its technologies](#) and procedures. Near misses, runway incursions and exploding airplane windows are real and keep on happening.

They aren't going to be prevented with a bureaucratic, "We've always done it this way" approach. In a world where technology becomes outdated almost as fast as it's created, and companies like SpaceX blast through red tape, the FAA must keep pace. Speed doesn't always feel natural.

We are about to have the right president to propel us forward. Together with the new Department of Government Efficiency Administration (DOGE), Trump's FAA administrator can reinvigorate and redirect the agency's entrenched bureaucracy. The FAA's best-and-brightest are exceptional. And like anyone in a foxhole, true aviators and their support cadre don't care about colleagues' colors, creeds or genders. They care about competency and mission.

Sadly, misguided Democrat-mandated cultural initiatives have done more to create a sluggish agency than an organization worthy of FAA's world-class talent. Consider an FAA Office of Civil Rights program which, rather than pressing its mandate to recruit wounded military veterans into the country's thin pipeline of air traffic controllers, wasted 18 months deploying cultural sensitivity training. Really? Is teaching the dangers of "unconscious bias" and incorrect pronouns to air traffic controllers as important as onboarding the next generation of professionals needed to secure our skies? Do you think travelers care when they're putting time and trust in the FAA?

Few of us will forget 2023's fiasco when FAA's 30-year-old Notice to Air Missions (NOTAM) computer system crashed, delaying 30,000 flights and canceling 1,300 more in a single day. This mounting morass of deferred maintenance and modernization across all 138 of the FAA's Air Traffic Control systems could be even more consequential than DEI distractions.

Simply put, if we don't fix the FAA now, within months American airspace could lose its status as the safest, most reliable and admired worldwide. Who's on standby? China.

Of course, this won't surprise anyone who has recently landed in one of the many Beijing-built airports proliferating across Africa, Europe and other continents, before flying home to a tired, decrepit terminal like the D.C.-area's Dulles International Airport.



If the US doesn't commit to modernization of airports, it could lose its status as the safest place to fly. FILE: Travelers wait to go through a security check point at O'Hare International Airport in Chicago, Aug. 31, 2023. (AP Photo/Nam Y. Huh, File)

In other words, transforming the FAA will not only better serve airline passengers and U.S. military aviators (who also depend upon the agency's air traffic control service) but will reinforce American global power and prestige.

Unlike successive Democratic administrations, Trump and his Republican allies recognize that we face existential competition with China – their massive Belt and Road Initiative is 11 years old and not slowing down – and that dominance in aviation is a critical component to winning global competition.

A master at securing and deploying capital effectively, Trump is always willing to spend money on results. He's likely to support a multibillion-dollar budget request emphasizing facility replacement, radar modernization and system modernization. Whatever the details, Trump will dislodge from Congress the resources FAA requires to fly well into the second half of the 21st century.

With a full coffer and blessings from the boss, the next administrator can replace during a single presidential term what the Government Accountability Office (GAO) in September described as FAA's "unsustainable" legacy computer systems that would require more than a decade to modernize. I have seen the acceleration with which Trump moves on matters of vital importance. He did it during Covid with R&D, and he can do it with the FAA, an agency that must have federal supremacy on local zoning and environmental regulations to get new airports built or expanded swiftly, not over decades like the GAO findings warn us about.

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Trump's penchant for the unexpected (look at his second term cabinet picks) will drive FAA innovation and create room for an Administrator who doesn't come from a traditional aerospace corporation. Boeing, Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, and other aircraft manufacturing giants, along with emerging companies with next-gen technologies, will remain crucial to American aviation, but new ways of thinking can elevate the FAA and public trust.