STATEMENT OF MICHAEL P. HUERTA, ADMINISTRATOR, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION (FAA), BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT & GOVERNMENT REFORM, ON "FLYING UNDER THE RADAR: SECURING WASHINGTON D.C. AIRSPACE," APRIL 29, 2015.

Thank you, Chairman Chaffetz and Ranking Member Cummings, for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. I would like to address some of your questions about the recent gyrocopter incident by explaining the FAA's role in airspace security and how we coordinate with other agencies.

First and foremost, the FAA's mission is aircraft and airspace safety. We operate the nation's air traffic control system to safely separate aircraft. Our primary focus is getting aircraft safely to their destinations and managing the safe flow of thousands of aircraft and their passengers around the country every day.

We also work very closely with the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security on a daily basis to support their aviation security missions, particularly here in the Capital Region. As part of that support we provide them a raw air traffic radar feed so they have situational awareness of what is happening in our national airspace system.

To enable our controllers to perform their core safety duties controlling air traffic, the first thing we have to do is to separate the aircraft that are communicating with controllers from all of the other objects in the air that are not aircraft. These other objects that the radar detects could be things like vehicles on nearby roadways, flocks of birds, weather events, or occasional kites or balloons.

Air traffic controllers could not do their jobs if they had to work with an unfiltered radar feed. They would not be able to distinguish the aircraft they are charged with safely handling from the other elements on their radar scopes.

We require aircraft that fly in the airspace around Washington, D.C., and other large cities around the country, to use transponders that broadcast basic information such as the type of aircraft, speed, direction, and altitude. When the radar detects those aircraft, it picks up the transponder information and displays it on a controller's radar screen. Controllers can then see all of the flights in a specific area, along with all of the identifying information for each aircraft.

Anything that doesn't have a transponder shows up as a symbol resembling a simple small dot on the radar screen – and there are typically many of them across a controller's radar screen.

To assist controllers in focusing on safely managing air traffic, we apply filters to the controllers' radar to eliminate the vast majority of those small dots. Safely managing air traffic is a controller's mission and they must be able to do that without distraction.

To support aviation, and national and homeland security, the FAA shares a real-time, unfiltered radar feed with our partners in the Department of Defense and several other agencies, so they can see exactly what we see and apply the appropriate filters for their own mission to protect the airspace. We also embed technical air traffic staff at a number of North American Aerospace Defense Command facilities around the country to provide additional operational expertise and support.

On April 15, Mr. Hughes' gyrocopter appeared on our radar as one of those small, unidentified elements. All available information about the slow moving, irregular symbol made it indistinguishable from other non-aircraft radar tracks.

After the incident, we conducted a forensic radar analysis and looked for a symbol that might match Mr. Hughes' gyrocopter. We understood he had taken off from a small airport in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, and we had an approximate time, so we looked at unfiltered radar data. A trained radar analyst identified a slow-moving symbol that traveled from Gettysburg toward the Capitol, and vanished from radar at about the time Mr. Hughes landed on the West Lawn. We now believe that unidentified radar element was Mr. Hughes' gyrocopter. The dot appeared only intermittently throughout the flight.

On April 15, the National Capital Region Coordination Center called the FAA at 1:24 p.m., to alert us to the flight based on information they received from the Capitol Police. When we got that call, we immediately notified our interagency partners on the Domestic Events Network, or DEN, a twenty-four hour, seven days a week communications line we operate to support a shared situational awareness among our interagency partners.

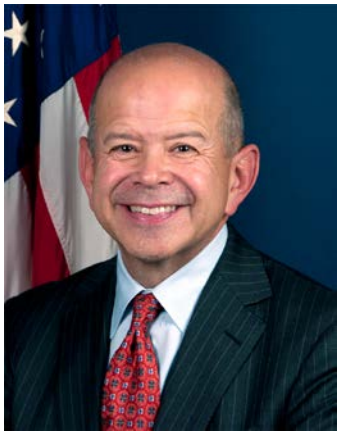
We activated the DEN on 9/11 to quickly share information about activity in the airspace with multiple agencies, and it has been active since that day. The DEN now includes more than 120 federal and local agencies, as well as major FAA air traffic facilities around the country.

The DEN has played a critical role in disseminating important operational information to other agencies as quickly as possible. When any of the agencies on the DEN learns about any kind of issue of concern in the airspace around the country, they can share what they've learned in real time by announcing it over the DEN. All of our partners have different responsibilities, making sharing information in real time vital so we're all operating with the same basic facts and can respond in accordance with our own specific mission requirements.

We're committed to our safety mission at the FAA, and we are dedicated to working closely with all of our airspace security partners to support protection of the airspace.

I would be happy to take your questions.

Federal Aviation Administration



Michael P. Huerta

Administrator, Federal Aviation Administration

Michael P. Huerta is the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration. He was sworn-in to office on January 7, 2013 for a five year term.

Huerta is responsible for the safety and efficiency of the largest aerospace ystem in the world. He oversees a $15.9 billion dollar budget, over 47,000 employees and is focused on ensuring the agency and its employees are the best prepared and trained professionals to meet the growing demands and requirements of the industry. Huerta also oversees the FAA's multi-billion dollar NextGen air traffic control modernization program as the United States shifts from ground-based radar to state-of-the-art satellite technology.

Huerta was confirmed by the U.S. Senate as the FAA's Deputy Administrator on June 23, 2010. On January 1, 2013 the United States Senate unanimously confirmed President Obama's nomination of Huerta for a 5-year term as FAA Administrator.

Huerta is an experienced transportation official who has held key positions across the country. His reputation for managing complex transportation challenges led him to the international stage when Huerta was tapped as a Managing Director of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games. The Olympics drew 2,400 athletes from 78 countries to Salt Lake City. Huerta was critical in the planning and construction of a variety of Olympic transportation facilities, as well as the development of a highly successful travel demand management system that insured the transportation system operated safely and efficiently.

Before joining the FAA, Huerta held senior positions at Affiliated Computer Services from 2002-2009 rising to the position of President of the Transportation Solutions Group; ACS is now a Xerox company specializing in business processes and information technology. Huerta was commissioner of New York City's Department of Ports, International Trade and Commerce from 1986-89. He then served as the Executive Director of the Port of San Francisco from 1989-1993. From 1993-98, he held senior positions in the U.S. Transportation Department in Washington, D.C., serving under Secretary Federico Pena and Secretary Rodney E. Slater.

He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of California-Riverside and a master's in public affairs, with a concentration in international relations from the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.