



Sample Op-Ed to be used by State and Local Officials

Advancing the Benefits of Drone Technology

By: _____

On November 2, I was proud to participate in (proud to see) the U.S. Department of Transportation's launch event for the new federal Drone Integration Pilot Program with Secretary Elaine L. Chao at Department Headquarters in Washington. The program will allow the accelerated integration of drone operations into the American economy, presenting the opportunity to create tens of thousands of new, high-paying jobs and maintain our country's aviation leadership in the world.

Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), commonly known as drones, are among the most exciting technological advancements in transportation today, holding tremendous promise for our communities and future. While consumer drones currently are the most numerous, options for commercial applications and public safety benefits are rapidly increasing.

In the coming weeks, our (jurisdiction) will have the opportunity to notify USDOT of our intent to apply for the Pilot Program, in partnership with a private sector company to test select advanced drone operations. The purpose of the program is for the federal government to collect data and best practices for future regulations surrounding more widespread drone use, in situations such as flights over people, flights at night, and flights "beyond line of sight."

Federal rules for drone operation have been an ongoing exercise in striking a balance. Rules around drones made in the past have been cautious, strictly regulating the operation of drones "beyond visual line of sight" of the operator, at night, at altitudes above a few hundred feet, and in many other ways. These rules have applied in all areas of the country, rural and urban. But

with fast-growing interest in drones among consumers, emerging possibilities for commercial applications and public safety uses for drones, there has been increasing demand for FAA waivers to its drone regulations and for an overhaul of its rules.

The consumer segment of the drone market doubled from 2015 to 2016. The commercial segment is currently smaller but even faster-growing and could have far greater positive impact on our (state's/city's/area) economy, if given the opportunity. Drones could have great utility for agriculture production, construction and other economic sectors. Research is being done on transporting critical medical supplies by drones — thereby avoiding gridlocked roads and more quickly reaching people in inaccessible and remote areas. In the recent hurricanes and wildfires, hundreds of drone operations greatly assisted in search and rescue efforts, along with damage assessments in the aftermath.

Unfortunately, because current regulations are seen as overly restrictive, much of the innovation in drone usage is happening overseas. This is concerning because the estimated economic benefit of utilizing unmanned aerial vehicles in our nation's air space could exceed \$80 billion and create 100,000 jobs in the next decade, according to a recent report by the Association of Unmanned Vehicle Systems International.

Among the benefits of this initiative will be the knowledge and experience gained from the program, which will help the FAA develop rules that allow our society to benefit more fully from the evolution in drone technology and continue to address concerns over safety, security and privacy.

The President's recent directive ordering the creation of this pilot program and Secretary Chao's vision for executing it are essential to encouraging America's vibrant spirit of innovation. American ingenuity and technical prowess are unmatched anywhere in the world. This pilot program will help ensure that Americans benefit from accelerated drone technologies and operations never seen before in our country.

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