

Stevens reiterates need for nation's aviation safety at Senate hearing

By Rob Stapleton

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Alaska's senior senator told aviation administration officials that safety was the moral and professional duty of aviation stakeholders, and that the Federal Aviation Administration should look at the examples of the Alaska Capstone and Medallion flight programs to improve flight safety across the Lower 48.

Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, on April 10, told FAA officials that aviation safety technology tested in Alaska could reduce accident and fatality numbers across the nation, as it has in the Last Frontier state.

The Capstone Safety Program, which started in Alaska in 2000, was disbanded by the FAA Air Traffic Office in December 2007. The program was recognized recently for its work in development the use of two-way Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast, or **ADS-B**, system deployment.

Those who were involved the **ADS-B** Capstone Program will receive in early June the coveted Collier Trophy, the nation's highest award for aviation achievement.

The Capstone Program's equipment, installed in the cockpit, is credited with improving flight safety in Western Alaska by more than 40 percent.

The nonprofit Medallion Foundation was started by the Alaska Air Carriers Association to improve pilot safety awareness and to reduce air carrier insurance rates.

Stevens, the ranking member of the Senate Commerce Committee, submitted a statement to the US. Department of Transportation saying, "The U.S. aviation safety system is a complex and redundant system that includes layers of coordination between many stakeholders, including the FAA, air carriers, manufacturers, pilots, inspectors and controllers, among others. When the 'safety first' culture breaks down, it cannot - must not - fail."

Stevens advised the FAA to study Alaska's Capstone and Medallion flight programs to improve the nation's aviation safety situation.

"In Alaska, our aviation community has worked hard to create an ever-improving culture of safety," he said. "As I have reported to this committee many times, Alaska is dependent on aviation more than any other state. With the vast spectrum and sheer amount of commercial cargo and general aviation in our state, it has been a challenge to continually decrease our accident rates. Through programs like

Capstone, Alaskans have been able to make dramatic strides in the area of aviation safety.”

He then noted that the FAA and Alaska's industry stakeholders are working toward a long-term goal to install **ADS-B** systems that would cover 90 percent of all operations in the state.

Speaking to the Medallion program, Stevens said, “It establishes safety standards that exceed regulatory requirements to help the Alaska aviation community detect safety trends or needs before actual accidents occur.”