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October 27, 2017

The Honorable Elaine L. Chao
Secretary of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

As you know, on October 25, the President directed the establishment of an Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Integration Pilot Program. As the Department designs this pilot program, I strongly encourage you to leverage existing UAS expertise at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) test sites. Thank you for your consideration.

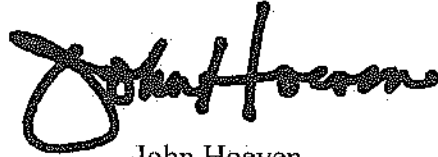
The national UAS test sites, mandated by Congress in 2011, are designed to work with the private sector to test and evaluate UAS technologies that will enable the integration of UAS into the national airspace (NAS). The FAA has already examined air space integration challenges for each test site, ensuring the safe operation of these aircraft during research and testing activities. For example, this year the Northern Plains UAS Test Site in North Dakota received a certificate of authorization (COA) from the FAA to conduct beyond visual line of sight (BVLOS) operations. The Northern Plains test site is pursuing additional waivers that will bring us closer to full UAS integration.

The new presidentially-directed pilot program provides an opportunity to collect information on UAS operations while developing regulatory frameworks that coordinate federal, state and local government interests. The best way to achieve these goals is to build on the successes that the Northern Plains test site and its counterparts have already achieved. The FAA already has confidence that the test sites possess the expertise required to fly safely and to generate useful data for FAA integration research. Moreover, the communities near test site operations areas already embrace UAS flights and are accustomed to this new technology. They are well suited to assess how such flights should be regulated in the future.

Your careful implementation of the new pilot program will accelerate the development of this increasingly important industry. As the program gets underway, I plan to bring UAS stakeholders in North Dakota to meet with the relevant Department of Transportation officials to plot the best path forward. I hope that you can assist us to develop a collaborative relationship that will make the UAS Integration Pilot Program a success and accelerate the use of UAS for a variety of exciting applications.

Thank you again for your recent visit to North Dakota to learn more about our UAS industry and capabilities, and I look forward to continuing to work with you in this exciting area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Hoeven". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

John Hoeven
U.S. Senator