

**Opening Statement of Governor Charlie Crist  
Nominee for U.S. Representative on the Council of the International Civil Aviation  
Organization, with rank of Ambassador  
Senate Foreign Relations Committee  
November 16, 2023**

Chairman Schatz, Ranking Member Hagerty, members of the Committee: it is my great honor to be with you today as the President's nominee to become the U.S. Representative on the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

I am grateful that my fiancé, Chelsea Grimes, of Minneapolis, Minnesota is here with me today. I thank her for her continued love and support. Interestingly, my hometown of St. Petersburg, Florida, was the site of the very first commercial flight; when Tony Jannus flew from St. Petersburg to Tampa, on January 1st, 1914.

Mr. Chairman, I greatly appreciate the opportunity to appear before this Committee and its esteemed membership. I am humbled by the moment, and by the confidence shown in me by the President and Secretary of State Blinken in submitting this nomination.

I have a lifelong commitment to public service and would be honored to continue that commitment in this position. If confirmed, I would view my role as advocating for the safety and security of every American who decides to board an airplane.

Nearly 80 years ago, 54 nations gathered in Chicago at the invitation of the United States to develop an agreement to promote the safe and peaceful development of civil aviation. This was a fraught moment, as the world was still at war and the concept of harmonious global air travel was very much in doubt. Consider the fact that simply traveling to Chicago by air from many of the participating countries was an act of considerable courage.

The resulting Chicago Convention was and remains the landmark agreement guiding the continuous development of civil aviation as a pillar of the global economy. And while the International Civil Aviation Organization, or ICAO, may be unknown to many Americans, its purpose and performance are crucial to U.S. national security and the wellbeing of us all.

In the 80 years since the Chicago Convention, no nation has done more than the United States to shape global aviation by driving innovation and focusing intently on safety and security. That leadership has featured a sustained investment in ICAO as a body intended to cultivate international cooperation and coordination.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, if confirmed it would be my objective to extend the legacy of U.S. leadership at ICAO, both to continue improving aviation safety and security, and sustainability: to address urgent challenges including aviation's impact on the earth's climate.

I would also reinforce longstanding U.S. focus on a culture of reform and accountability at the organization, working in concert with ICAO leadership -- Secretary General Juan Carlos Salazar and Council President Salvatore Sciacchitano -- who have both shown encouraging commitment to these essential principles.

It is important to note that ICAO is not immune to the risks posed to international organizations by authoritarian states such as Russia, or that such states have already been hard at work to undermine the purpose and performance of these bodies.

ICAO can only succeed if it remains aligned with its intended role and in keeping with its longstanding values. That role, those values are threatened when member states disregard their international commitments, as in the case of the Belarus Ryanair forced landing to arrest political dissidents, or Russia's decision to dual register stolen leased aircraft following its further invasion of Ukraine.

If confirmed, I look forward to working with this Committee, the aviation industry, and the community of expert federal agencies and offices to maximize the U.S. impact at ICAO.

Mr. Chairman, the United States history of leadership at ICAO is something about which we can all be proud. It would be a profound honor to serve in such an important role, and if I have that good fortune, I will serve with a determined focus on the safety, security, and wellbeing of the American people.

Thank you, and I welcome your questions.