

American Drone Leadership Summit

Drone Dominance and Airspace Sovereignty One Year Later

And what an evolution it is...

Good morning everyone. I'm Lisa Ellman, CEO of the Commercial Drone Alliance. Thank you all for joining us today at CDA's American Drone Leadership Summit. It's great to see so many familiar and also new faces.

Today's American Drone Leadership Summit marks a significant moment for our industry and our nation. One year out from the White House Executive Orders on drone dominance and airspace sovereignty, we find ourselves on the cusp of real promise and opportunity for our community and for the broader public.

It's a critical time. As an industry colleague put it last week, this year feels like it's been "everything, everywhere, all at once."

We brought together a diverse group of leaders and luminaries from across the USG and the industry today, to have the necessary conversations that this moment calls for.

At the Commercial Drone Alliance, we've spent most of the last decade pushing for a right-sized aviation regulatory framework. That work isn't finished – and aviation safety will always be foundational to this industry. But today's conversation is much bigger than aviation regulations alone.

It's about our national airspace system.

Our national security.

Our economic competitiveness.

America's place in the world.

That's why this year's Summit feels bigger, and different, and even more important than past events we've hosted. Because it is.

You know, I hesitate to use a word like "history". Many of us have spent a good part of our careers working toward this moment.

And yet, in many ways, it feels like we're just getting started. When we look at the history of drone integration, we can see the obstacles we've had to overcome – disproportionate regulations, technology gaps, commercial viability, societal acceptance, MORE regulations.

But we also see something else. We see *opportunity*.

Those two executive orders, published more than a year ago now, ushered in a new chapter of American drone leadership.

Since then, we've seen the Beyond Visual Line of Sight Rule move to final interagency review.

We've seen a critical Counter-UAS interim final rule take effect.

We are reviewing a proposed airspace framework to protect our nation's most sensitive critical infrastructure.

We've navigated new supply chain requirements and conditional approvals.

And we've experienced the enormous operational challenge of securing the World Cup, while enabling legitimate commercial drones in the same airspace.

These are meaningful milestones.

Now comes the harder—and more important—work of turning policy into lasting opportunity.

It's on us – all of us.

We need to build an ecosystem that ensures American companies can innovate, compete, manufacture, and operate at scale.

One that strengthens our economy, supports our national security, integrates seamlessly with the broader aviation system, and earns the confidence of the public through safe, reliable operations.

We're all here today because, while we've certainly seen progress, we still have a ways to go.

The policies that will shape this industry—and determine whether the U.S. leads the world in advanced aviation—are being written in real time.

And they can't be written by the government alone if we expect them to stand the test of time.

They *require* collaboration between regulators and industry, operators and innovators.

We've seen important policy steps aimed at addressing risk. Now we need policies that unlock opportunity.

Regulatory clarity. Financing. Tax incentives. Realistic transition timelines. Those are the tools that will allow American companies to compete and to win.

So, here's my challenge to everyone in this room.

Embrace the incredible expertise assembled here today. You are the leaders in this industry, you are the leaders across the U.S. government.

Challenge your assumptions.

Leave your comfort zone.

And before you leave tonight, identify one tangible thing you can do to advance American drone leadership.

None of us has all the answers, but I'll bet almost every answer is somewhere in this room.

Drone manufacturers – talk to counter-drone companies.

Security experts – talk to drone operators.

Regulators – talk to innovators.

The technology is ready. The momentum is real.

It's up to all of us to build the policies, the partnerships, and the trust that will allow American drone leadership to reach its full potential.

Thank you to our event sponsors and our event team for making today possible.

Now, let's kick off our incredible program with an important discussion about what we mean by American drone leadership.