



# A Special Message from our CEO



Lisa Ellman

What an exciting and transformative year our commercial drone industry had in 2025! As we sought to restore U.S. global leadership in commercial drones, the [Commercial Drone Alliance](#) (CDA) was proud to be at the forefront of many policy, advocacy, and convening efforts that will shape our industry for decades to come. We helped to develop the President's drone innovation and security executive orders, worked closely with our members on numerous rule and policy comments, co-hosted a World Cup drone security event with the White House, addressed the recent FCC notice, and so much more. As the CEO of the CDA, I am proud of the tremendous strides our team and membership made on behalf of the broader commercial drone ecosystem.

We kicked the year off by growing our team, bringing Liz Forro into the CDA family as our Policy Director, and we couldn't be more thrilled to have her on board! Formerly with the FAA, and with extensive experience on the Hill working for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Liz dove right in. Her years of policy and advocacy experience have greatly benefited our membership and the commercial drone community as a whole. We are fortunate to have her helping shape the policy and regulatory framework that will govern this industry's future.

Liz's experience was put to the test almost immediately when CDA was invited to testify at a [House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Hearing on Counter-Unmanned Aircraft Systems \(C-UAS\)](#). In my testimony, I emphasized that drone innovation and drone security must advance together - as two sides of the same coin. This message resonated with the White House, which kicked off a flurry of activity throughout the year. Notably, CDA was invited to work closely with the White House to advise on [two executive orders](#) that were signed by President Trump in June 2025 – “Unleashing American Drone Dominance” and “Restoring American Airspace Sovereignty.”

In May, the CDA once again convened industry and government leaders at our CDA Innovation and Security Summit. Speakers from across the industry, federal agencies, the White House, and Capitol Hill gathered to share ideas on how to scale commercial drone operations while strengthening airspace security. This Summit allowed us to emphasize our policy priorities for the year and demonstrate the CDA's unique role as a trusted bridge-builder, while fostering collaborative dialogue between policymakers and the commercial drone ecosystem.

The first half of the year felt like sprinting a marathon, so I was incredibly thankful that we were able to add more team-power. Drone Policy Coordinator Molly Knudsen and Social Media Coordinator Danny Hart joined the CDA staff family this year, bringing timely organizational and creative muscle to our CDA bench. Their addition couldn't have come at a better time, because our pace only increased in the second half of the year.

After years of anticipation, the FAA and TSA released the Beyond Visual Line of Sight Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (BVLOS NPRM) in August. To say we were surprised with some of the content in those 700+ pages is a bit of an understatement, but we dug in and convened over 20 meetings with our Board of Directors and our membership to craft the [CDA's BVLOS Comment](#) which reflects the needs of our constantly innovating community. Our membership showed up in force – proving once again that collective engagement is our greatest strength.

During the BVLOS NPRM comment period, CDA hosted another ambitious event, the CDA BVLOS Stakeholder Summit, to align industry voices and elevate shared priorities. At the Summit we discussed the NPRM and how we can unify as an industry to ensure the final rule reflects the interests of all industry stakeholders. This event featured fireside chats with FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford, and the Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy Michael Kratsios, along with industry panels on operations, security, airworthiness, and service provider requirements, and the impact of the proposal on small businesses. This important event fostered dialogue around the challenges with the NPRM and helped our stakeholders understand each other's concerns.

Later in the fall, drone security took center stage when the CDA partnered with the White House 2026 FIFA World Cup Task Force and DRONERESPONDERS to host [Countering the Threat: Counter UAS Industry & SLTT Grant Forum](#). The event connected law enforcement agencies and C-UAS companies to learn about DHS funding opportunities for World Cup host cities. The corresponding \$500 million C-UAS grant program represents a major investment in not only FIFA World Cup security, but also in safeguarding the 2028 Olympics, National Capital Region, and large-scale sporting events nationwide.

The CDA also reached a major milestone in November when we celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our launch. It's hard to believe it's been 10 years since Gretchen West (now our COO) and I co-founded the CDA to support the commercial drone industry. We knew then how important it was to have a singular focus on the challenges our industry was facing. We are proud of our growth, our expanding influence, and how far we've come as an industry. We are looking forward to continuing this growth over the next decade and beyond with all of you.

As the year closed, our industry faced renewed uncertainty following the FCC's public notice banning all foreign drone technology, including foreign-made critical components, from receiving FCC authorization to be used in the United States. While we strongly support the development of a domestic supply chain, such an effort requires sustained attention and investment from the federal government to make it a success. CDA quickly unified our

membership to navigate what this mandate means for our community and how we can [advocate for more clarity, flexibility, and proactive USG support](#) as the domestic drone industry adjusts.

Despite these challenges, we also saw a multitude of member success stories over the last year, from successful funding rounds and organizational growth to operational expansion and new vehicle launches. I continue to be inspired by our community's drive and resilience to keep innovating through adversity. Please keep sharing these stories, both with us as well as each other – community success is a powerful stimulant!

The CDA exists because of [our members](#) – to support your priorities, and to educate and advocate on your collective behalf. We are incredibly grateful for your support and trust through the successes and challenges of this year, and we look forward to continuing to work with you to further promote the interests of the American commercial drone industry. I'm confident that our community's commitment to improving American lives through safe, secure innovation is an ideal that will transcend all obstacles. The CDA remains steadfastly committed to continuing our well-informed, member-driven advocacy. So, let's shake off the dust, roll up our sleeves, and get to work!

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Ellman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Lisa" on the top line and "Ellman" on the bottom line.

Lisa Ellman  
Chief Executive Officer  
Commercial Drone Alliance