

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 7, 2004

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Treasury and General Government
133 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20150-6037

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation,
Treasury and General Government
144 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20150-6037

Dear Chairman Shelby and Ranking Member Murray:

We know that you share our commitment to ensuring that our skies remain the safest and most efficient in the world. And with air travel on the increase and Secretary Mineta's call to triple our air capacity, now is the time to ensure that safety is not jeopardized by the failure to have enough trained air traffic controllers watching our skies.

The General Accounting Office, the Department of Transportation's Inspector General and the FAA Administrator have all publicly stated that our nation is facing a serious staffing crisis. In fact, the GAO has said that an estimated 5,000 controllers plan to leave by September 2005 and warned that "ultimately, FAA's ability to successfully plan for and manage this situation will dictate its overall impact on the nation's air traffic control system and the safety and efficiency of air travel in the United States."

The FAA itself has stated that there will be almost a 50 percent shortage in the next ten years. And it takes up to five years to train a controller – and not everyone makes the cut. What does this mean for the flying public? Quite simply, delays, congestion and the real potential for safety risks that none of us want to consider.

While we are all too aware of the budget constraints facing this Congress, we also know that this is a problem that is not going to go away anytime soon. And the longer we wait, the worse the problem gets for the flying public. The FAA should start introducing 1000 controllers per year into the system to address this shortage.

We are, therefore, writing to urge you to join us in taking real action to address this safety issue. Although the Administration did request \$14 million to address this looming shortage in its FY 2004 budget, unfortunately this amount was not funded. We strongly urge you to provide this funding in the FY 2005 Transportation, Treasury and Independent Agencies Appropriation bill. The concern over staffing shortages is real and we must act quickly to ensure that we have highly trained professionals running the safest and most efficient air traffic control system in the world. Providing this funding will prevent delays and congestion, and assure the public that we will continue to maintain our gold standard of air traffic control safety.

Thank you for your attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Byron L. Eng

Arlen Feld

Harry Reid

Richard Durbin

Art Bond

Herb Kohl

Mike DeWine