

**March 10, 2016**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The Senate Commerce Committee unveiled [its version](#) of the FAA reauthorization bill yesterday. The Committee's proposed authorization only lasts until the end of fiscal year 2017, which means if this proposal is signed into law, Congress will work on a new bill early in the next session of Congress (the 115<sup>th</sup>). This will also be the case if Congress only passes extensions in this session (the 114<sup>th</sup>). An 18-month authorization allows lawmakers time to address some of the issues they have identified with the current authorization, while also buying them time to work through the more complicated areas of concern, such as drone privacy, passenger facility charges, and air traffic control reform.

The Commerce Committee plans to mark up the bill next Wednesday, March 16, with a possible vote on the Senate floor in April. We remain in close contact with Chairman John Thune (R-SD), Ranking Member Bill Nelson (D-FL), and their staffs about the details of the legislation which they have drafted to ensure our concerns are addressed and to seek inclusion of several provisions in the manager's package of amendments (noncontroversial amendments) that will be considered during markup.

One of those issues is the hiring of air traffic controllers. In the Commerce Committee's proposed bill, we advocated for, and are glad to see, an increase in the maximum hiring age -- from 31 to 35 -- for air traffic controllers with previous military or civilian experience on the job. Unfortunately, there is also a provision that mandates the FAA establish guidelines for an in-person interview with all applicants for air traffic control positions before they could be hired to ensure English speaking proficiency. While we do not disagree with the logic, we believe a mandated in-person interview is not necessary and would have the unintended consequence of further delaying the hiring of air traffic controller candidates. Our understanding is that within the past two years, no employees enrolled at the FAA Academy have been required to take an English language proficiency exam. Further, the FAA website and the vacancy announcements already have a requirement that candidates "speak English clearly enough to be understood over radios, intercoms, and similar communications equipment." Our suggestion is that the language states that the Administrator ensures all employees enrolled in initial qualification training for air traffic control specialists at the FAA Academy meet the International Civil Aviation Organization's language proficiency requirements. We are also working with the Committee on its proposed pilot program to evaluate the feasibility of using remote towers, particularly in the Federal Contract Tower Program and for airports without any air traffic control tower, or to improve safety at airports with towers.

While both the House and Senate continue efforts to move their respective bills forward, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bill Shuster (R-PA) and Ways and Means Committee Chairman Kevin Brady (R-TX) today introduced an FAA authorization extension to fully fund the FAA and the federal aviation programs through July 15, 2016. H.R. 4721, [the Airport and Airway Extension Act of 2016](#), is a clean extension of FAA programs and the Airport and Airway Trust Fund collection authority. H.R. 4721 avoids the lapse of the FAA's authority to collect aviation taxes. Without the extension, the FAA would have to engage in an emergency shutdown

furlough and the Airport and Airway Trust Fund would lose approximately \$30 million per day.

Funding disruptions have needlessly created numerous problems for our workforce and the NAS, including staffing shortages and a slowdown in NextGen modernization projects. That is why our top priority continues to be securing funding certainty to create stability for continuous technology upgrades, long-term planning and hiring, and to ensure the safety of the NAS. A stable and predictable funding stream is also essential to adequately support air traffic control services, staffing, hiring and training, long-term modernization, preventative maintenance, and improvements to airport infrastructure. Uninterrupted funding is necessary to promote growth in the system and to allow us to continue to lead the world in aviation innovation.

As always, we welcome your questions at [faabill@natca.net](mailto:faabill@natca.net).

In Solidarity,

The NATCA National Executive Board