

National Air Traffic Controllers Association

AFL-CIO

January 3, 2019

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker-Designate
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Leader McConnell, Leader Schumer, Speaker-Designate Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy:

We are writing to express the National Air Traffic Controllers Association's (NATCA) strong support for H.R. 21, Making appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019; and H.J.Res. 1, Making further continuing appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for fiscal year 2019, which will end the partial government shutdown and reopen nine federal departments and associated agencies, including the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). No one should be under the illusion that it's business as usual for aviation safety during a shutdown. Every day the shutdown continues, the negative consequences to the National Airspace System (NAS) and its employees are compounding.

Even though air traffic controllers and traffic management coordinators remain on the job, dedicated to the safety of every flight, they don't know when they'll receive their next paycheck and that adds more stress to an already stressful profession. Additionally, over 3,000 NATCA-represented aviation safety professionals have been furloughed and sent home as a result of the shutdown. This shutdown and the resulting furloughs are rapidly eliminating the layers of redundancy and safety on which the NAS is built.

Controllers are among the human components of the NAS and are part of a complex team. That team includes staff support specialists who work at air traffic control facilities to provide tactical, strategic, and administrative support of training, quality assurance, traffic management, airspace and procedures, operational automation, military operations, and safety management system. It also includes engineers who design and construct critical infrastructure necessary for safe flight operations including air traffic control towers and radar control facilities, radar maintenance and installation, navigational aids, and communications systems.

These and other aviation safety professionals - who along with air traffic controllers operate the NAS - work in a system that has no room for error. These men and women work together with our certified professional controllers for the NAS to function at peak safety and efficiency. However, during a shutdown, they are furloughed.

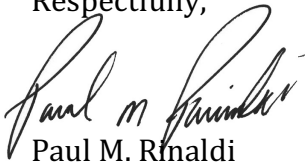
Right now, we are asking our controllers to maintain the safety and efficiency of the system without the necessary contribution of 3,000 safety professionals. The furloughs make an already complicated job even more difficult by removing a key human component from the NAS. We wouldn't ask a surgeon to perform an operation without the assistance of a support team, and we shouldn't be asking air traffic controllers to continue working without support staff.

The government shutdown also means hiring and training delays, which worsen the current air traffic controller staffing crisis. Due to the shutdown, the FAA was forced to suspend hiring and close its training academy in Oklahoma City where new air traffic controller hires begin their careers. In addition, classroom and simulator training at air traffic control facilities is also suspended. Stopping the hiring and training pipeline will exacerbate the current controller staffing crisis. The number of fully certified controllers is now at a 30-year low. If the staffing shortage gets worse, we will see reduced capacity in the NAS, meaning more flight delays.

Further, the FAA's ability to develop and implement new technology and modernize the NAS is also being negatively affected by the government shutdown. Critical work on FAA NextGen modernization projects, including redesigning flight paths, has come to a halt, and the FAA has stopped issuing Airworthiness Directives to mandate safety fixes to existing aircraft. Infrastructure construction and equipment modernization has ceased at airports and radar facilities across the country including Charlotte's new air traffic control tower and terminal radar approach control facility that will now be delayed past the scheduled January 2019 completion date and modernization of Seattle Air Route Traffic Control Center.

On behalf of the nearly 20,000 NATCA-represented federal employees, we encourage you to bring to the floor and pass H.R. 21 and H.J.Res. 1, in order to reopen the nine federal departments and their associated agencies, including the FAA. The FAA requires all of its critical employees so that the NAS can maintain its place as the gold standard for the world. Every day the shutdown continues, the negative consequences to the NAS and its employees are increasing. We encourage you to end the shutdown now by passing H.R. 21 and H.J. Res. 1.

Respectfully,



Paul M. Rinaldi
President

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