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Senate

IN RECOGNITION OF THE ARCHIE LEAGUE MEDAL OF SAFETY WINNERS: JEFF AULBACH, NEIL CÓSPITO AND MICHAEL JACOBSON

Mrs. SHAHEEN: Mr. President, I rise today to salute the work of three New Hampshire-based air traffic controllers – Jeff Aulbach, Neil Cospito and Michael Jacobson – who calmly and quickly resolved a complex situation in the snowy skies of New England in 2018. The three men were awarded the prestigious Archie League Medal of Safety Award from the National Air Traffic Controllers Association (NATCA) last year, and I ask all Americans to join me and NATCA in marveling at the poise they all showed on that November afternoon.

Jeff, Neil and Michael work at the Boston Air Traffic Control Center, a regional Air Route Traffic Control Center in Nashua, NH that covers tens of thousands of miles of airspace above New England, New York and northeast Pennsylvania. On Tuesday, November 20th, 2018, Neil was working an F-16 aircraft from the 158th Fighter Wing of the Vermont Air National Guard. Poor weather conditions were preventing the pilot from landing the aircraft at its home base in Burlington, VT. Neil scoured the region for a suitable location outside of the sprawling weather system, and he quickly found one in Syracuse, NY. He cleared the aircraft to travel southwest to its new destination and asked the pilot to estimate his time en-route and his remaining fuel. When the pilot relayed that he had 15 minutes of fuel for a 15-minute trip, Neil knew that the F-16 had become an emergency aircraft.

As the aircraft left Neil's controlled airspace, fellow air traffic controllers Jeff Aulbach and

Mike Jacobson continued working the emergency situation. Jeff and Mike promptly evaluated their options. They decided the best course was to divert a flight of KC-135 tankers from an nearby, unrelated mission and to conduct a mid-air refueling. Jeff explained to the KC-135 pilots that the F-16 was at 'Bingo Fuel' – a term used by military pilots when they reach a critical and emergency fuel state. When he secured agreement from both crews, Jeff executed precise time intercept vectors to join the two aircraft and begin refueling. As Jeff worked with the aircraft in the sky, Mike worked the radar and communicated with the airport in Syracuse to confirm suitable landing conditions. A short time later, the F-16 safely touched the ground in Syracuse.

Quick thinking and error-free execution from Neil Cospito, Jeff Aulbach and Mike Jacobson saved the F-16 and its pilot from a number of dangerous alternatives. And they played a pivotal role in maneuvering this flawless refueling with a number of other planes sharing the skies. As many of us travel across the country throughout the year, we should take a moment to reflect on the significance of air traffic controllers like Neil, Jeff and Mike and thank them for working every minute of every day each year to keep our skies safe.

On behalf of the people of New Hampshire, I ask my colleagues and all Americans to join me in thanking Neil, Jeff and Mike for their service and wishing them all the best as they continue their good work.